

My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 4

Takashi Kajii

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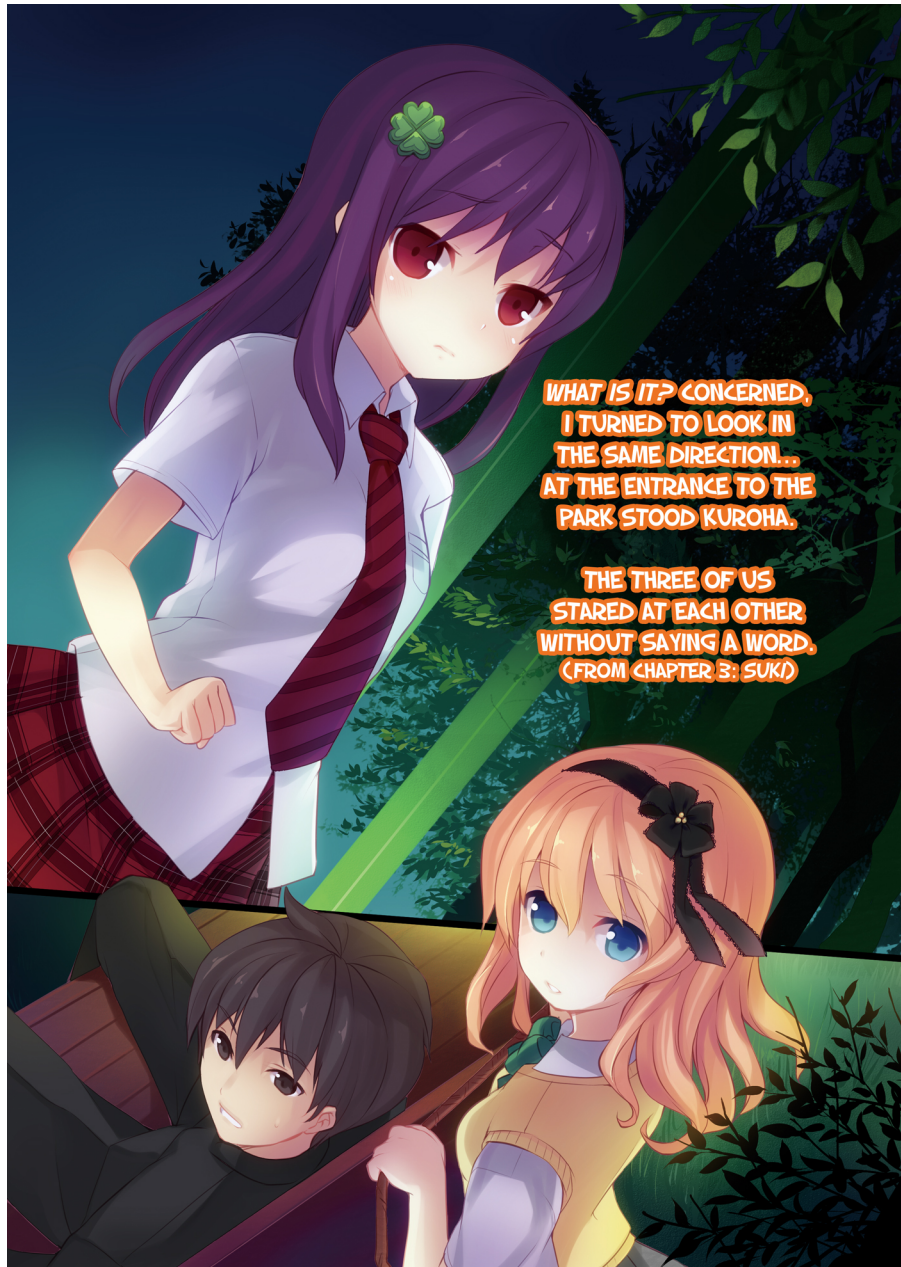
My Little Sister

Can Read

漢字
KANJI

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Illustrator: Halki Minamura

4



WHAT IS IT? CONCERNED,
I TURNED TO LOOK IN
THE SAME DIRECTION...
AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE
PARK STOOD KUROHA.

THE THREE OF US
STARED AT EACH OTHER
WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.
(FROM CHAPTER 3: SUKI)





SHE WAS WEARING A THIN
EMBROIDERED TOP,
AND A FLOATY PINK SKIRT.
HOMYURA!

YUZU-SAN WAS WEARING
EXACTLY WHAT THE HEROINE OF
ONIAKA, HOMYURA, HAD WORN.
(FROM CHAPTER 9: COMPROMISE)

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“When I opened the *randoseru*, my little sister was inside.”

Something unforeseen happening at an unexpected time... This was a prose technique that Odaira-sensei loved to use. Kuroha had taught me that there was an archaic expression that meant the same thing: “a bolt from the blue.”

A bolt from the blue...

Or “bluebols” for short...

When I said that to Odaira-sensei, he laughed and smiled, but when I said it to Kuroha, she got angry at me.

But putting that aside...

It didn’t matter whether it was “When I opened the *randoseru*, my little sister was inside,” or “a bolt from the blue.” Either way, I just want to emphasize how surprisingly, at a time when you least expect it, something utterly unbelievable can occur.

That’s right.

There will be no warning, no sign. They’ll just show up all of a sudden.

Chapter 1: WHoops

“——I love you, Onii-chan.”

After Kuroha said those words, time stood still. The still silence of the late night enveloped us as we sat facing each other on the floor of Kuroha's room. My face was vaguely reflected in the shiny polished flooring, and although I couldn't quite make it out, I was sure I looked like I had just taken a sucker punch.

Kuroha, having just launched her surprise attack, gazed straight at me with an ever growing intense look in her eyes. Her lips moved as if to speak, but she stayed silent.

Damn it, Kuroha... You're clearly waiting for me to say something. That much I knew, but I was completely dumbstruck by this aura she was emitting that was totally different from her usual self, and could say nothing. I couldn't think of what I should say in response.

But then, I noticed the intensity in Kuroha's eyebrows slowly drain. Her determined face slowly changed into one that was worried and apprehensive.

“Hey, Onii-chan... Come on, say something...”

“Okay.”

Kuroha had her hair covering her face and was twirling the ends around her finger. “...Maybe I was speaking too quietly and you couldn't hear me?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I said.

“Oh, I see —— What?” Kuroha's head jerked up. “You mean... you didn't catch that?”

I was unable to reply.

“.....Haaahhh,” sighed Kuroha in exhaustion, as if she thought she had finished some work but then realized that it was all for nothing. “Well then, I guess... maybe next time.”

Kuroha turned around, as if she were trying not to look at me. The tension-filled air around her began to drain away.

It seems like that'll be all for tonight. Relieved, I was finally about to relax my shoulders, when...

“No... Not next time!” shouted Kuroha to herself.

Here comes the tension again!

Kuroha spun her body around, grabbed me by my shoulders, and encroached upon me rapidly. Her beautiful, adult features suddenly zoomed up in front of my face, and my heart started racing

instinctively.

“No, I’m gonna say it now! Listen carefully, Onii-chan!” she said in a voice louder than before. Maybe she was still being considerate of the fact that it was the middle of the night, so it wasn’t exactly yelling, but she was projecting very clearly:

“I! Love!”

You... love...?

“You!” 《※▽◎▼▼》

...

.....

.....*What?* I blinked my eyes a few times. *Did Kuroha just make some kind of weird noise like cloth rubbing against itself?*

《※▽◎▼▼》

Whoa, there it is again!

“Kuroha, what’s wrong with your voice?”

“Th-That’s not me...” said Kuroha, shaking her head and looking flummoxed.

I was pretty sure the second time I’d heard the weird noise, I hadn’t seen Kuroha’s mouth move. So then what was that odd voice I’d heard speaking in some crazy language?

《※◎■☆◆▼▼》

—!

Again I heard the voice. It wasn’t Kuroha, and of course it wasn’t me. And yet, it was echoing through the room. Something was here, and it was close!

Kuroha and I looked at each other, and at nearly the same time, spoke.

“.....Wha...?!”

“A... Ahhh!”

Kuroha screamed in a girly voice and threw her arms around me in fright.

After such an incredible thing appearing like that, I feel like letting out a scream or two myself. But what was it the two of us had seen...?

In the back of the room there was an object, hovering, floating in the air. It was a black cloth that emitted a golden light.

“S-So bright...” I said, as the yellow light shone into my eyes and I squinted.



《★○△.....This should...◎▽...work...▼▼》

*I think I just heard it say something like, “This should” and “work”?!
Am I just hearing things?*

《Greetings, and pardon me.》

I-It talked! There was no mistaking it this time. The black cloth had *very* clearly spoken Japanese! And not only that, it had sounded like a young girl!

“O-O-Onii-chan...” Kuroha stuttered.

“Ah, Kuroha... You’ve noticed, too?”

“Th-That’s...”

Yes!

The black cloth was made of a thin and flexible material, like nylon or polyester. And if you looked closely, you could tell it was slightly see-through. One half was split into two thinner parts — like two legs. With that material, and that form, it could only be one thing...

“Pantyhose!” I exclaimed. The floating black cloth was a pair of talking (black) pantyhose! “It’s just like the main character of my novel!”

This is incredible! The novel with the pantyhose main character I had just uploaded to that website, and which had gotten such horrible reviews, had become reality!

“Yippee! Wow! *Banzai!*” I screamed.

“O-Onii-chan, how can you be so excited in a situation like this?” Kuroha demanded.

“But, how many times am I going to meet a talking pair of pantyhose? Of course I’m overjoyed to be able to have this crucially important experience. I’m on cloud nine here!”

“It’s very like you to be happy about this, Onii-chan, but is it really the time?” she asked.

“Oh, you have a point.” I moved away from Kuroha, who was still shaking like a leaf, and stood up. When encountering an unknown life form, there is something you should always do first.

“Good evening.”

《Good evening.》

The greeting is the basis of all communication.

“Did you hear that, Kuroha?” I asked. “Pantyhose-san here responded to my greeting. Go and search the over-200-year-old Yahoo Answers database for the question, ‘If I meet a pair of talking pantyhose in the middle of the night, what should I do?’ and enter the response ‘Say good evening to them,’ this instant!”

“I-I can’t believe it... I mean, I can’t believe there’s a talking pair of pantyhose, but the fact that you can just communicate with it like

that, Onii-chan, is even more unbelievable. Also, there's no way anyone asked a question like that..." said Kuroha, who even when in shock was still logical and quick-witted.

"How do you do?" I asked. "My name is Gin Imose. What is your name?"

《Nice to meet you. My right leg is WR, and my left leg is UR. My full body name is WRUR.》

"WRUR... Wear Your Pantyhose-san? Like, on your head? A pair a day keeps the doctor away, they say!" I replied.

《I am WRUR.》

"So, if there's a Wear Your Pantyhose-san, is there a Tear Your Pantyhose-san, too?" I asked. Suddenly...

《Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah! S-S-Stop it, please! The word 'tear' is TABOO to us! Kyee! So scary! I can feel it shivering through me!》

WRUR Pantyhose-san curled herself into a ball and was shaking like a leaf.

"Oh? I apologize. Is it like saying the words 'fail' or 'slip' around someone cramming for exams? Crushing dreams and scattering them to the wind..."

《I'm TRYing to get you to stop, sheesh!》

"...My brain is not accepting the things my eyes are showing it right now..." said Kuroha, her head in her hands.

"What's wrong, Kuroha?" I asked. "It looks like you aren't able to accept the reality that's right in front of you. But there isn't anything strange about this in the slightest. After all, this is clearly a dream, duh."

《No, this is not a dream.》

WRUR Pantyhose-san uncurled herself from a ball into a more pantyhose-like form, with her two legs waving up and down like human hands.

《This is very much reality. I AM sorry. AFTER seeing what seemed like a confession, I GOT so excited, I just popped right out.》

"Popped right out... You mean like when your you-know-what spills out of your briefs, something like that?" I asked.

《...》

"Wait, don't tell me... You're not wearing underwear?! You're just going straight commando under those pantyhose? I love that. I love it when girls do it, and it's even a thing with men's pantyhose, too."

《UM... Maybe I should clarify that I AM a girl.》

"Oh, my mistake, then."

"You're probably the only person on the planet that could talk dirty to a pair of talking pantyhose and leave them speechless, Onii-chan," said Kuroha.

Don't praise me like that, man! Makes me ticklish.

《HAHAHAHA. Very funny.》 Perhaps WRUR Pantyhose-san was enjoying herself, as she wavered left and right in the air. 《NOw then, even though we just got to know each other... I will SHortly disappear.》

“What? Already?! I haven’t even offered you a cup of tea,” I said.

《Yes... AND do not worry about being left with any unnecessary memories. Unlike MY brother, I am SKilled at memory manipulation, so there won’t be any problems.》

“Your brother?” I asked.

《Yes, that’s right. MY brother. My brother sucks at memory manipulation. That’s why the manipulation he did on Amaneko Makoto failed so spectacularly... Whoops, I’ve gone and said too much.》

What? WRUR Pantyhose-san, you know Amaneko-chan?

.....Aha!

I suddenly remembered about Amaneko-chan. It was the day that Amaneko-chan and Kuroha had had it out on the roof of the “Tower of Culture” and the day I’d groveled before Amaneko-chan’s grandfather.

On the way home, Amaneko-chan had told me, her blood-related older brother, about the existence of a “messenger of God.” When asked about what form this “messenger of God” had taken, she had replied like this:

“That’s right! A black cloth with a golden glow!”

That’s a perfect description of WRUR Pantyhose-san! She wasn’t having occultic delusions, she was telling the truth!

But that was not all.

The deductions that Professor Choumabayashi and Odaira-sensei had made back then had been mostly just jokes, but it all started to make sense now. The “messenger of God” had come from the far future...

“Don’t tell me, WRUR Pantyhose-san... you...” I began.

《WELL, even if I tell you, you’ll just forget it all in a moment.》

She ignored me and began to float up close to the ceiling. The light coming from her fabric began to glow stronger, and then flashed!

“Uwah!”

In the blinding, swirling light, WRUR Pantyhose-san began to flicker... and I could tell that WRUR Pantyhose-san was trying to disappear! *I have to ask her the question!* I leaned my body forward...

“Are you... a Pantyhose Party Member from the 38th century?!”

And in that instant, I lost consciousness.

.....

.....

.....

Huh? I can see a white ceiling...

I looked around with only my eyes and... *Is this Kuroha's room?*
“...Onii-chan, are you awake?” asked Kuroha, who was right beside me.

It seemed that the two of us were both lying face-up, side by side. We both sat up and looked at the clock on the wall.

It was 1:20 AM. The last time I had looked at the clock, it had said 1 AM, so not much time had passed.

“Hmm, Kuroha... it seems the two of us took a little nap,” I said. “What happened before that?”

Neither Kuroha nor I could answer that question. I had no memory of what had happened before we'd gone to sleep.

I recalled that I had come to her room, and she had been translating, and then I read some *Literary Gal*, and then the two of us talked about Amaneko-chan, and then we played WRITE-ON-THE-BODY on each other, and then...

I tried to remember what had happened between that and when we'd fallen asleep, but I couldn't. *Weird. It feels like there's this gap where my memories have just been scooped out...*

“Kuroha, my head is kind of fuzzy and I don't feel well,” I said. “I'm going back to my room to sleep.”

“...Yeah. I'm going to sleep now, too,” replied Kuroha, sitting down on the corner of her bed.

She'll probably lie down and go to sleep now. I stood up and headed for the door, thinking of returning to my room to sleep. But then...

“Haahhh...”

I could feel Kuroha's heavy sigh on my back, filled with emotion. I turned around, a bit worried, and found Kuroha a little sullen.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

“I'm not exactly sure myself, but things ended up like this again, huh?”

“Like this?” I asked.

Kuroha didn't respond.

“Do you remember what happened, Kuroha?”

“No... Never mind,” barbed Kuroha, who then kicked the floor like a child, which was odd for her.

I told her goodnight, and left the room. I took two, then three steps down the hallway — and then stopped.

I turned around toward Kuroha's room, and whispered internally...

I'm sorry, Kuroha. There was something I couldn't tell you before.

I had lost consciousness and there was something unnatural missing from my memories, but I did remember just a little bit. In the back of my mind, I could still recall...

There was a person. Someone was calling my name. Perhaps

because the memory wasn't clear, there was static like a noisy video in the beginning, and I couldn't tell who this person was, but I could gradually make out their outline... and then there was Kuroha's face.

In my memories, Kuroha's face suddenly appeared, closing in on me....

"I love you, Onii-chan..."

That was what she said.

In my brain, this movie kept playing over and over. If I just took it as it was, it would be nothing less than a confession of love.

Familial love? Sibling love?

Or maybe... It couldn't be...

I shook my head. *Let's just get some sleep. I'll sleep, and clear my head. Just put it all out of my mind for now.*

I mean, this is bad, yeah? My heart's beating a mile a minute.

The feeling in my heart was like an alarm bell going off, telling me that something had changed between Kuroha and me.

...Wait a sec, come on. What am I thinking? Kuroha and I are brother and sister! And my memory is all screwed up, so I have no idea if that picture in my mind is real or not. I can't be mistaking reality for some dream I had, right?

I forced my beating heart to calm down, and returned to my room.

*

* * * ☐☐※●☐ 2 3 ★☆▼▼☐☐ * * *

(* * * WRUR's 23rd Century Report * * *)

THis is bad.

Their emotions were just so primitively expressed, I went and showed myself to them. WHoops. My predecessor told me to ABsolutely under no circumstances ever show yourself, and I went and did it.

Unlike the Knee-socks Party or the Leggings Party, we Pantyhose Party Members have "Living Together with Humanity" as our most crucial platform tenant, so showing ourselves to humans of this time period is definitely a big NO-no. I was able to properly manipulate the memory of those two, though, so it shouldn't POse any further problems.

That being said, that younger sister Kuroha Imose sure is possessive of "The Great Father" Gin Imose. It's almost like she has him as her personal possession.

And yet, WHY does she restrain herself so? Is it a special feature of the ancestors? NO, I do not see that. Rather it seems to be a special something about her, specifically.

HMmm, it has only been half a month since I came to this time period. I am yet INexperienced as an observer, and I cannot come to a clear conclusion.

However, it would be bad if this Kuroha Imose exerted too much influence over Gin Imose, yes? History would change afterwards, and either we would never be born, or perhaps the global language “○ (Earsh)” would never come to be. Either one would be BAd.

I AM Japanese, and as such, I have a duty to protect the Japanese traditions and culture we have passed down from generation to generation.

Well, let's hope it doesn't have to come to any direct intervention. I have other humans which I should observe, so I will go WAtch them, too.

Yuzu Mirokuin. Let's go have a look at her.

☆□♂♀∞◆▼▼

★

One day in the 23rd Century, Kuroha's room.

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san! It's time for the *Gai Odaira Hour*. Miru's gonna appear as well, so let's all listen in!” I exclaimed.

“At this point, it wouldn't be the *Gai Odaira Hour* without Miru, would it?” remarked Yuzu-san.

“I hear that Miru's gotten a rush of fan letters lately, too... I'm a bit worried about it all...” sighed Kuroha.

Transcript of “The Gai Odaira Hour” broadcast August 8th, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author), Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/
Illustrator)

“Letters from the Listeners Segment”

◆ “Kids these days seem like they're from another planet.”

What is wrong with young people these days? I ask them what their favorite pattern of panties is, and they say, “I don't know.” They don't seem to care or understand about my penchant for “squealing like a pig” (I'm not exactly a spring chicken anymore, so pardon the old-fashioned lingo...). It was only a little while ago that anyone on the street could answer that question in a flash, but that era seems to be passing by.

Are people's favorite panty patterns or favorite attributes no longer important to the younger generation? Or have I just fallen behind the times?

What is your opinion of young people these days, Odaira-sensei?

—FUKUOKA Prefecture, Pure White Panties ☆ Fundamentalist
(72 years old)

Odaira: “Ah, the laments of a fellow elderly gentleman, I see.”

Haruka: “I also can relate to this question, indeed. I can answer it very precisely, yes I can.”

Odaira: “Yes, it true that young people these days cannot even identify what pattern or color of panties they prefer. It is truly unbelievable for people such as us. But to stop there would be oversimplifying. Rather, perhaps we should be modifying the question. Do not ask them what their favorite pattern is, but rather ask, ‘Do you prefer sky-blue panties or ones with a strawberry print?’ In that manner, even a young person without a strong opinion should be able to answer. It is important for us adults to guide the youth along the correct path.”

Haruka: “Hoho... That is a very adult opinion of yours. I’ll put in a vote for the strawberry print, by the way.”

Odaira: “Enough with your nonsense. We adults should know that sky-blue panties are the superior choice!”

Haruka: “On the contrary, the adult choice is clearly strawberry print panties, you goddamn *gimai*-loving bastard! Just kick the bucket already!”

Odaira: “Now you’ve gone and done it! Let’s take this outside and settle this like adults!”

Miru: “It seems the only adult in here is the grade schooler.”

Chapter 2: Flowers

Why must summer vacation always pass by in a flash? I wondered. It had already become August before I'd even realized it.

This summer, in the year 2202, there had been that big event where I met up with my blood-related little sister Amaneko-chan, but other than that, it'd been completely normal. This had been a bit of a problem for me, as I'd had nothing to write about in my life's work, i.e. my personal experience diary.

This diary was where I wrote about what happened to me in my daily life, but reworked into a novel-style. I'd started it when I had time-traveled to the 21st century on a whim, but at this point, it had become so important that I considered it basically an extension of myself.

One night, while I was nodding off in front of my PC trying to come up with something interesting to write in my diary, Kuroha, in a T-shirt, came walking into my room.

"Onii-chan, can I work on my translation here, in your room?" she asked.

"What's up? You seem to come into my room like this often lately, Kuroha."

"Y-Yeah... I don't want to bother you when you're writing your diary, though..."

"Oh, don't worry about that, you're welcome to stay," I replied.

Kuroha opened up her classical literature on my table and started her translation work. Her debut as a professional translator had already been decided, after all. I'll cut out the details, but in short, Amaneko-chan's grandfather was paying the publishing costs to the publisher to get the book put out.

Around the same time, there had also been plans for me to debut as an author, but it'd turned out that the company that approached me was a sham publisher who was trying to scam me. Thankfully, before anything could happen the matter was handed over to the police, and the publisher was shut down, but... well, of course my debut as an author was also now out of the picture.

I want to catch up to Kuroha and debut as an author, no matter what. Writing my personal experience diary every day is good and all, but maybe I should start a new work to submit to a Newcomer's Prize competition?

All right! Let's start with the climactic scene from the novel I started

writing before... *"The Downpour."*

"They descended in a great spiral from the heavens... the pantyhose..." I read the latest sentence...



“Yes, how very *fin de siècle*... That should make anyone smile,” I remarked.

“Wow, you just keep topping yourself, Onii-chan. And I can’t understand why you’d say this would make people smile...” commented Kuroha.

“Wh-Whoa, don’t go sneaking up behind me like that, Kuroha!” I cried. She was standing right behind me as I sat at my desk, leaning her body forward slightly to stare at my computer monitor.

“Well, I glanced over and saw you writing something nuts again, so it piqued my curiosity and I wanted to check it out,” she replied.

“Hey, don’t go calling it nut—” I started to complain, but at that point, my eyes were pulled toward the vision of the top of her breasts that I could see down her neckline, since she was leaning in.

Hey, that’s a pretty sexy collarbone you’ve got there, you know...

Kuroha clicked her tongue as she realized where I was gazing and pulled back, covering her chest.

Oh, shoot! When Kuroha gets mad she always smacks me with her dictionary! I thought, instinctively taking a defensive posture, but, oddly, Kuroha didn’t end up punishing me.

“F-For Pete’s sake, O-Onii-chan...” Kuroha seemed troubled and embarrassed.

My heart skipped a beat. And at the same time I thought, *Kuroha has been acting strange lately...*

I’d started to feel like she’d been staring at me during meals, and we’d been together nearly every night...

Kuroha looked at me with her eyes shining and muttered to herself, “...Yeah, I have to tell him...”

Tell me... what?

I was just about to ask her that, my heart quivering, when it happened.

“Gin-san, I’ve finally perfected it! I’m coming in!” came a voice from outside the room, after knocking twice.

Yuzu-san, wearing her jersey, came into my room breathlessly... holding two young men under both her arms.

I was taken aback for just a second, but then I noticed how their skin seemed oddly shiny. *Ah, right. Those are the life-sized dolls.* They were made very realistically, so they must have been for design reference or something, unlike life-sized anime figures.

The dolls were naked, and tightly bound with rope.

Yuzu-san was beaming, a proud smile across her entire face, but suddenly looked apologetic when she saw the two of us.

“I didn’t realize you were here, Kuroha-san... My apologies for barging in...”

“What are you talking about? You’re always welcome!” I assured her.

“...I’m sorry...” muttered Kuroha.

For some reason the mood turned awkward between the three of us. I tried to break the ice.

“Yuzu-san, you said you’d perfected something. What is it? Did you actually make those dolls by yourself? Are they love-dolls?”

“Love... doll?” she asked, quizzically.

“Yuzu-san, you don’t have to respond to that...” chastened Kuroha.

“Oh, my... Okay then. What I perfected was... this.” Yuzu-san’s sparkle returned to her face, and she thrust the dolls she was holding in front of us.

Is she saying, “Behold my rope technique!” or something?

“Well... to my eyes, they look just like a standard tortoise shell binding...” I said.

“Yes, it does look like a standard tortoise shell binding at this point. But this is no mere tortoise shell, it is the ‘Tortoise Shell Binding Omegamma’ that my brother proposed to me,” said Yuzu-san, spinning the two dolls around in her hands.

On the doll’s backs, we could see the letters “ω” and “γ” written by the ropes!

“My brother would explain that the point of this is that the letters omega and gamma look like the boobs and the crotch,” she explained.

“My god!” I bumbled. “I can only say this is a work of art! It seems like my prose would be very compatible with this!”

“Exactly! That’s why I wanted to show this to you right away, Gin-san!” said Yuzu-san, but then she paused for a second and continued, “O-Of course, I wanted to show you as well, Kuroha-san, so I’m glad you are here, too!”

“Th-Thanks...”

Yuzu-san must have been so overjoyed from perfecting her new technique that she was smiling even more than normal. *Her love for rope-tying really is something...*

“Kuroha as a translator, myself as a writer, and Yuzu-san as a rope master! It sure would be nice if all our dreams were to come true!” I exclaimed.

The image of Yuzu-san holding a rope and laughing her head off in front of the roaring waves of the Sea of Japan sprang to my mind.

Yeah, I think that suits her well.

“Huh? Gin-san, my dream isn’t to become a rope master, you know,” corrected Yuzu-san.

“Oh? It’s not? Then what is your dream, Yuzu-san?” I asked, not thinking it was a very serious question or anything, but Yuzu-san turned to look at me and her cheeks flushed red.

“Well, th-that’s... of course...”

“Of course, what?”

“...to be... -san’s bri...” Yuzu-san muttered something

unintelligible. Her voice went in and out, so I wasn't able to make out what she had said.

I think I heard something about brie?

"So... you want to make cheese?"

"N-No, not cheese... I-I..." said Yuzu-san embarrassedly, looking down at her feet. "I-I'll be leaving now!"

"Uh, okay..."

Yuzu-san almost ran to my door after shouting out, but her feet stopped at the entrance and she turned around to look at me. She looked disappointed, and glanced back and forth between me and Kuroha.

What is it? Yuzu-san's attitude seems completely different. It's almost like someone is pulling on her hair as she tries to exit my room.

"...Huh? Is there something stuck to our faces?" I asked.

"Well... you two really do get along, don't you? You two spend a lot of time together like this, late at night..."

In the corner of my eye I saw Kuroha jump a little.

It looks like Yuzu-san is smiling, but her eyes tell me a different story... Maybe it's just my imagination...

"I'm... a little jealous," said Yuzu-san in a voice that was lacking confidence... or was it sadness?

Yuzu-san said her goodbyes once again, and returned to her room. Kuroha and I remained behind, and despite the fact that we hadn't done anything wrong, it felt kind of awkward.

"Hey, Onii-chan... Did you see the faces on those dolls?" asked Kuroha.

"Huh? Sure, I saw them..."

"So, did you notice?"

"Uh, I have no idea what you're talking about," I replied.

"The faces on the dolls looked a lot like... like the face of her brother that passed away..." said Kuroha.

Ah, I see. Yuzu-san must have shown Kuroha the picture of her brother, too. I hadn't realized there was any resemblance at the time.

"Do you think the reason that Yuzu-san practices so hard on her rope techniques is because she doesn't want to forget about her lost brother?" she asked.

"Are you saying that she was actually in love with her brother, like romantically?" I questioned.

"No, not like that. I think it's something more like pining for her family," said Kuroha.

Yuzu-san had called her brother "her only family" before. I wasn't aware of all the details, but Yuzu-san's parents had raised her very coldly. Her older brother was everything to her. When we'd first met, her brother had passed away, and she'd been living alone in a huge

mansion. Yuzu-san seemed bright and happy on the outside, but I wondered what she was feeling on the inside.

I pretend that I know Yuzu-san pretty well, but isn't it more like I don't know anything about her at all?

"Onii-chan, do you remember when you were asking about her dream? I think I have a good idea what Yuzu-san's dream is," said Kuroha.

"What is it?"

"Family."

"Family?" I asked.

"Family isn't something that just naturally pops up, you know. There's a process to obtaining one. And the process that Yuzu-san is envisioning is..." Kuroha was talking around the issue, as she tended to do.

Honestly! Talk in a way that your big brother can comprehend, will you?

The image of Yuzu-san as she was leaving my room came back into my mind. The way her hips filled out the jersey she was in... I couldn't get enough of that meaty goodness...

No, no... Not that!

The Yuzu-san I'd seen from behind had looked to me like a lonely puppy who had lost its master.

★

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My, my... Yuzu Mirokuin is yet another one who does not seem to reveal her true feelings. Is burying your feelings deep down really typical of ancient humans? Honestly speaking, I always thought that ancient people were more purely instinctual. Dye me surprised. Or perhaps this is something specific to her personally?

I CANnot understand. But I am a LITtle bit curious. And just THINKing about it will be boring...

Let's go look at how Yuzu Mirokuin used to be, if only just a little bit.

☆ □ ♀ ∞ ◆ ▼ ▼

★

November, 201X. A hospital in Tokyo.

Yuzu was walking down the linoleum hallway wearing her middle school jersey and holding a shopping bag. After a while, she came to a stop in front of a certain hospital room and quietly peeked inside. She saw a thin young man wearing silver rimmed glasses laid out on a bed.

That boy was Kouya Mirokuin, Yuzu's brother.

Kouya had developed cancer at the young age of 16, and had been hospitalized ever since. Sadly, there was no longer any hope of a cure by the time they'd discovered it, and the doctors had given him only three or four months left.

Yuzu held back the tears, and put on a smile.

"Nii-san, it's me. I came to visit you," she said as she entered the hospital room.

Her brother Kouya immediately turned his face toward her.

"...Oh, it's you, Yuzu. And I'd gotten everything ready, too," he said, sounding a bit disappointed.

"Oh, my... I guess you were expecting the nurse? I'm sorry."

Yuzu was curious why Kouya said that, and, as she expected, there were all kinds of books and magazines piled up on top of the bed sheets.

Magical Girl Super Sadie manga, *Mega Magazine*, *Champion Red Ichigo*, *Comic Megastore*... and there was another book, too. It was a magazine that Kouya had gone all the way from Okutama to Machida to find in a giant Book Off — an old edition of *SM Sniper*.

Pretty girls, erotica manga, SM... It was all so very much like Kouya, it brought a smile to Yuzu's face.

There was a reason why all the manga and magazines were strewn over the bed. Kouya had been calculating when the female nurse would come in to check on him, and he had purposefully spread out the reading material that was to his "personal taste."

"The nurse will see these books. And the moment after she'll gulp and look toward me with those eyes... I can't get enough of that moment! It makes me... It makes me...!"

It seemed like Kouya had become absorbed in his fantasies of being glared at by the nurse. His face was flushed and he was very slightly quivering.

Seeing Kouya his usual self, Yuzu sat down on a steel stool that was in the corner of the room. And then...

"Huh?"

There was a bouquet of flowers on the side table by the bed that she didn't recognize. There were a number of round, pink flowers that looked to her like daisies which hadn't been there the previous day when she had visited. Someone must have brought them earlier that day.

"Ah, I see that Mother must have come..." she said.

"Yeah, she was here earlier," said Kouya.

Yuzu's parents had gone to work overseas a number of years ago, but after Kouya's cancer had been discovered, they had returned to Japan temporarily. Despite that, they weren't staying in their house in

Okutama where Yuzu lived. Rather, they were staying at a residence within the city, and Yuzu hadn't met with them face-to-face. They visited Kouya separately from Yuzu, coming at different times.

Yuzu stared intently at the pink flowers that she assumed her mother had brought. Her mother loved the color pink, as did Yuzu.

It makes me think about the past...

Back when she was little, there had been two times when she'd said to her mother in front of a flower shop that she wanted some pink flowers. But both times her mother had said no and seemed annoyed, saying, "Ask me some other time."

There was a time in elementary school when she had caught pneumonia and had to be hospitalized. She had asked her mother to bring her some pink flowers while she was in the hospital, and thankfully, at that time at least, she'd said she would...

But in the end her mother had forgotten that promise, and her hospital stay had never been decorated with any pink flowers.

Yuzu continued her silent recollection.

"Yuzu? What's the matter?" asked Kouya.

Ah, oops!

Yuzu realized what kind of expression must have been on her face at the moment and quickly turned it back into a smile.

"You'll be graduating from middle school any day now, Yuzu, won't you? You got a boyfriend or two by now at least?" her brother asked.

"Well... I'm only in middle school, you know? There's no way I could get a boyfriend..."

"Ha ha... You always were a late bloomer, Yuzu. And you're super cute, so when you get to high school, you're going to get plenty of attention, I bet."

"Come on, Nii-san... Enough about that..." protested a red-faced Yuzu, who was always embarrassed by conversations like this.

Kouya gazed calmly over at the blushing Yuzu, and smiled with a tinge of sadness.

"I wish we could have gone together... to Hakumei..." he said.

Yuzu responded with silence. Kouya was talking about the private school Hakumei Academy. The Mirokuin family had funded part of its endowment, and Kouya was a student there. Yuzu was going to start high school there next spring. If Kouya had been well, the two of them would have attended together.

Nii-san, why must you say something so sad...?

Yuzu wasn't able to stop her tears from overflowing. She didn't want to fall into sadness, but her tear ducts had other ideas...

"Well, it's not like high school is so great or anything. Nobody there understands me," said Kouya, trying to change the subject.

Kouya was a loner in school. He loved 2D girls above all else, and was a huge masochist, so he didn't even attempt to hide his tastes or proclivities at school. It was no wonder all the students around him kept their distance.

"I mean, I don't wanna just die like this," he said. "Please, spread moe far and wide in my stead, Yuzu! ...Hee hee, yeah right."

"Oh, my..."

By the way he said it, Kouya was probably joking. But Yuzu took those words deeply, deeply to heart.

"Anyway, enough about that. My one true regret is, you see..."
Kouya's tone of voice had changed to be completely serious. "It's you, Yuzu, who I'll be leaving behind."

Yuzu clutched her chest and looked askance at the thin-faced Kouya.

"Yuzu, listen carefully..." started Kouya, like he was about to give important instructions. "Don't pay any heed to our old man or his ball-and-chain, and run away from home."

Yuzu said nothing in response. It was a conversation she had heard from Kouya quite a lot lately.

"This family isn't good for anything except for its name. Throw it away!" he ordered.

"Nii-san, but..."

"Yuzu... do you remember this hospital?"

...Of course I do.

This was the hospital where she had stayed for a month when she'd gotten pneumonia in elementary school. Her parents had been working in Japan at the time, and they'd visited her...

...once. Maybe twice.

She had been in a four-person room, with other similarly-aged children. The other children's parents had come and cared for them every single day. Almost like it was something that was the norm for them.

Kouya had come every day instead of her parents, so she hadn't been lonely, but...

"I couldn't believe how coldly they treated their own daughter... At the time I seriously considered just abandoning those parents of ours. Didn't you think the same way, Yuzu?" he asked.

"Abandon them... How could I even think about doing that?"

Yuzu wasn't lying. She really did feel grateful toward her parents. After all, they had taken her away from the orphanage where she had been abandoned as a baby. So maybe it wasn't exactly a happy environment, if you looked at it from the perspective of society, but...

At some point her father had lost interest in Yuzu, and her mother had been against her adoption from the start, so she had always been

treated coldly by her. Yuzu had been raised with hardly knowing any love from her parents.

However, she'd never wanted for anything financially, and putting aside love and affection, her parents *had* raised her, after all. Yuzu felt that was all she could ask for.

"I think we should be glad we were raised in the Mirokuin family," she said.

"Do you truly believe that from the bottom of your heart?" her brother asked.

"Yes..." said Yuzu, her tone of voice lowering subconsciously. Kouya blinked once, then continued with a perceptive, cutting mood.

"Say, Yuzu... I know that the reason you wear jerseys all the time is because you don't want to wear the clothes our parents thoughtlessly pick out for you."

Yuzu was taken aback and her mouth was left open in surprise. *Nii-san, you could tell so much about me?*

"Well, your lack of fashion sense doesn't help either. One of your few flaws."

"Oh, my..."

With that unnecessary comment, Yuzu puffed up her cheeks in a pout, and Kouya poked them as he continued.

"Yuzu, you are really kind. And you have an amazing smile. But that smile... to me, it seems a little sad. Make your dreams come true. If you are able to find a place or a person that makes you happy, then... don't hold back. Dive in head first."

Small droplets of tears started to form in Yuzu's eyes. She wiped them away with her hands balled into fists. Kouya reached out his hand to Yuzu and muffed up her hair a little, giving her a head pat.

"Nii-san..." she murmured.

Kouya stayed that way for a little while, and then without any warning...

"Okay, Yuzu. Time for the usual."

Sniff. "Okay..." Yuzu powered through her tears, reached into the shopping bag she had brought with her, and pulled out...

...a rope.

It was time for their usual role-playing.

Yuzu wrapped Kouya's body around and around with the rope, and hung the rope up from one of the curtain hooks in the ceiling. When she pulled the rope with some force, Kouya's body began to slowly rise off the bed. With his legs and arms bound tight, Kouya looked almost like a bagworm.

"I'm going to raise you," said Yuzu, her voice still tinged with tears. Kouya began silently lifting toward the ceiling.

"Oho! Ah, I can't stand much more! I'm at my breaking point

already! I'm going to warp now! I'm going to warp now! Ah, before I warp, I want to read one of my old favorites from Napoleon Books! And why did they name themselves after some famous French guy? I wanna know, I wanna know, I wanna know! I've got to go back to that Book Off and look for more. Bwut anyways, Yuzu, can Iz warp now? Can I warp as some modern art pig sculpture? I'm warping! I'm warping! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaahn..."

—Two months later, Kouya passed away.

His funeral was held at a church, as per his parent's religion.

At the chapel, Yuzu stood blank-eyed in her mourning clothes.

As the priest recited the words from the holy book, her mother wept aloud and her father's face contorted in sorrow as he stood in silence. Yuzu didn't hear a word the priest was saying, and paid little attention to her parents.

In her mind the image of the healthy Kouya would appear, and then disappear. Appear, and then disappear. Kouya's body was laid out in a coffin just a few meters in front of her, but Kouya himself was now only a part of her memories.

Soon, the funeral was over and Yuzu's parents called to her and said that they would not be returning to Japan for a while, and that they'd give her plenty of an allowance, and things like that. Yuzu listened to her parents without any emotion, trying her best to smile.

As Yuzu was walking on her way home, crestfallen, she recalled the words of her dead brother. He had told her to abandon her family... but she didn't know how. Yuzu wasn't able to think of anywhere else she could go.

She wished he hadn't told her to make her dreams come true. After all, this was a world where she couldn't even get someone to buy her a flower. If even such a little wish couldn't be granted, then...

She had been abandoned by her birth parents like some unwanted trash, raised by parents without even a trace of love, and now she'd had the only person who had ever let her into his heart, her brother, taken from her at a young age. Yuzu thought to herself, *How can I make my dreams or hopes come true in a world so cruel as this? Even if I keep hoping, I'm sure this world I live in will find a way to pry it from my grasp. That's just how the world works.*

She felt like the road ahead of her led down a black, bottomless pit.

And then, she saw a flower shop on the other side of the road. A young woman was being handed a bouquet of flowers by the shop lady, and she broke into a happy smile.

Yuzu watched the scene in silence for a little bit, and touched her hand to the katyusha hairband on her head. It was a present she had

received from Kouya. Her hand touched the flower decoration on the katyusha, and Yuzu's face regained its sparkle.

I'm in pain from Kouya's death. I feel like my heart might break from the loss at any moment. But, I can't just go on grieving forever. Kouya would get mad at me. Let's smile. If I smile, then even if I'm not happy, at least the people around me will be.

At least... if I can become a flower for someone else, that would make me happy. And then, one day, if I can meet someone that I can smile at from the bottom of my heart...

In the spring, Yuzu began her first year at Hakumei Academy, the school that Kouya had attended. On the first day of school, wrapped up in her school uniform and sporting a smile, she left her mansion with a traditional, "I'm heading out now!"

There was no response. No one other than Yuzu lived in the mansion. Since Kouya's funeral, her parents had not returned to Japan, even once.

An empty mansion...

Yuzu would not end up meeting her destined prince from the future until a few months later.

★

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Odaira-sensei's trying something interesting again in this month's edition of *Literary Gal*! He's translated more classic literature, but this time, he even did some creative translation and added in all the bits that are just implied in the original!"

"...He added things that weren't in the original? I have a really bad feeling about this..."

"It seems like he really inflated the word count. Let's read it right now!"

Special Issue *Literary Gal* September 2002

"Gai Odaira's Classic Literature Translation"

★ "I Am a Cat" by Natsume Souseki

Original Text

I am a cat.

Odaira-sensei's Translation

NYA!

NYA! NYA!

COMES IN → LILKITTY

LILKITTY INTO HUMAN ← WHOOPSEE ◎
A LILGIRL ← DUH
COMES IN → ONII-NYAN
LILKITTY: ONII-NYAN, LICKY LICKY
LILKITTY KITTY SO LIKE LICKY
ONII-NYAN: LICK HERE 2
ONII-NYAN CHANGE LICK
LICKY LICKY
LICKITTY!
LILKITTY: LILKITTY is KITTY.
ONII-NYAN: ONII-NYAN is ONII-NYAN.

★ “Snow Country” by Yasunari Kawabata

Original Text

The train came out of the long border tunnel into the snow country.

Odaira-sensei's Translation

COMES IN → BORDER (LILSIS)
COMES IN → ONII-NYAN
BORDER: ONII-NYAN PASS OVER ME?
ONII-NYAN: GOIN 2 JOB
BORDER: DONT GO! ONII-NYAN STAY IN ROOM!
ONII-NYAN: UWAA
BORDER: FUFUFU NO LET U GO 2 OTHER WOMAN PLACE!
ONII-NYAN: CANT PASS TUNNEL!

“.....I don't even have anything to say.”

“Of course you don't. You're so moved, you're at a loss for words, yes? I could feel the fierce brother-sister love so strongly in the second one. That BORDER little sister really felt strongly about keeping her brother to herself, didn't she?”

“...keeping her brother to herself, huh...?”

“Oh? What? Why are you looking so serious all of a sudden?”

“N-Never mind...”

Chapter 3: *Suki*

“GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA”

NOW OPEN ← YATTA

IN SHIBUYA TOKYO

GOOD KID/BAD KID ← COME 1 COME ALL☆

It was on a Sunday in early August.

We were all invited to a restaurant owned by Odaira-sensei that he had personally funded. Odaira-sensei didn't just write novels, but also had an entrepreneurial side to him. He'd already founded a number of children's academies, children's centers, and children's swimming schools around the country.

FYI, thanks to issues Odaira-sensei had caused, all of them had been shut down.

Having learned from these mistakes, Odaira-sensei seemed to have decided to challenge himself in a different field of business this time.

The name of the restaurant was “GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA,” and just like the name implied, it was a restaurant that served time-honored traditional school cafeteria food.

Odaira-sensei had been inspired when he'd seen the yakiniku restaurant by that celebrity in the 21st century... I think it was called “Yakiniku Yuko Ogura” or something... and he had opened up this restaurant in record time. GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA's waitresses were all 2D elementary school students wearing aprons, with the concept being “What if Odaira-niinyan snuck into an elementary school during lunchtime?”

When I first heard about it, I was overwhelmed with how very Odaira-like the idea was, but Kuroha said her usual dismissive, “He'd just be arrested.”

I wasn't the only one that was invited, it was the entire Imose family. Dad, Mom, me, Kuroha, Miru, and even Yuzu-san were all welcome.

There were two reasons Odaira-sensei had invited us. One was related to Miru. Miru would be debuting as an illustrator for Odaira-sensei's *KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE*. And it wasn't just for this work that he wanted her illustrations, but any book he'd write in the future, as well.

Miru was still in elementary school, so Odaira-sensei must have

realized he needed to talk to her parents. He'd asked them for this time to meet face-to-face.

The other reason was related to my parents. Just by coincidence, the day happened to be their 19th anniversary.

Just so you know, both of my parents' families had been against their marriage, and there had been this whole story about them eloping which was very dramatic and all that. They would always say to people, "Have a 2D romance while you're still young!"

Each generation of Imose men always seemed to suffer from tricky romantic situations or marriages that were difficult for their families to accept. I wasn't blood-related to the Imoses, so if I got married, I had assumed it would be pretty normal, but when I'd told my dad that, he'd said, "No, I think you've got plenty of the Imose in you."

I was never sure why he had said something like that to me...

But on that day in August, the mystery was revealed.

SHIBUYA, TOKYO

GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA was right in front of the train station. SHIBUYA had been known as a hip spot for young people long, long ago, and this hadn't changed at all in the 23rd century. Odaira-sensei had opened his restaurant here in hopes that as many young people would patronize it as possible.

As we arrived at SHIBUYA, we saw the clue that this was a place where young people hung out... none of the beautiful girls were wearing any panties.

...Sorry about that. You probably have no idea what I'm talking about, so let me explain.

I meant that the 2D illustrations of pretty girls on the billboards and signs were not wearing any panties. For example, one of their miniskirts might be flipped up and you could see a little bit of their bare butt. It was the "no panties" style that was so in vogue these days.

For young people, panties were taken as a "symbol of the establishment," and the number of people who rebelled against them had grown considerably. Now, it was true that I loved the style of wearing pantyhose without any panties underneath, but that was an exception to the rule! Panties are the very soul of literature, and I believed them to be absolutely crucial to one's life. For those young people who viewed panties with such disdain, I could only feel a great sadness.

I'm just in high school, but maybe I'm already kind of old-fashioned?
No matter what era you lived in, it was always the curse of those boys who loved literature to be viewed by their peers as out-of-touch with the times.

Odaira-sensei was waiting for us near a certain bronze statue near SHIBUYA Station. It was a statue of a dog named HACHI. According to Yuzu-san, it had been there since the Showa Era and was quite famous. At the time there was just the statue of Hachiko, but in our time it had been renovated to add in a statue of its owner next to it. It goes without saying the statue was of a beautiful girl flashing her panties.

It might be the city of youth, SHIBUYA, but at least the traditional statue of HACHI's owner was properly wearing (and showing) her panties. Relieved, I lined up next to my Dad and paid my respects with him.

Now then, where could Odaira-sensei be?

He turned out to be just waiting on the other side of the statues. Kuroha and I were quite taken aback when we saw him, as he was actually in the form of a man, unlike his usual form lately of a little girl.

“Geezer, you get done in by the summer heat?” teased Miru.

Odaira-sensei noticed us and laughed. “My public image is still this one, after all. On days like today, I need to make sure to maintain it properly.”

He was wearing a perfectly-tailored white suit. Instead of a handkerchief, I could see a pair of sky-blue panties hanging out of his breast pocket. He really looked like a dashing gentleman.

So cool!

In front of my parents, Odaira-sensei bowed deeply, lowering his head. “Mother, Father, I am so honored you were able to come.”

“...Oh boy, I don't like where this is going...” muttered Kuroha, making a disgusted face for some reason.

Having met up with Odaira-sensei, we all headed toward the restaurant. GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA was located on the first floor in quite a normal multi-tenant building. We had heard that we had the entire restaurant to ourselves today. *Thanks a bunch, Sensei!*

We were about to enter the restaurant when...

“Um...” said Yuzu-san, who was standing in front of Odaira-sensei and my parents hesitantly. “I'm sorry about coming along with you all...”

Odaira-sensei looked like he didn't understand what she was getting at one bit.

“Well, I'm not a part of the Imose family, after all...” she murmured.

“Oh, that's it. Really?” Odaira-sensei rebuffed her. “What are you talking about? I already consider you a part of the Imose family, you know. Father, Mother, I presume you are fine with that as well?”

My parents both nodded happily.

“...Thank you all so very much!” Yuzu-san exclaimed with a smile.
You’re still worried about that kind of stuff, Yuzu-san?

When we’d gotten the invitation from Odaira-sensei, Yuzu-san had first volunteered to stay home, saying that she wasn’t a member of the Imose family.

It had been about two months since she had started living with us. Currently she was mostly just helping with the housework, but starting in September, it was planned for her to start going to school, as well. When we had first brought Yuzu-san home with us, we hadn’t told our parents that she was from the 21st century, and introduced her as “a friend that is visiting from far away.” Of course we were asked a lot of questions, but they had ended up letting her live with us with surprisingly little convincing.

Honestly I felt like they were being a little too careless about the whole thing, but Kuroha was of a different opinion.

“I think that Mom and Dad... they sorta understand her situation,” she said.

“Understand... what exactly?” I asked. “The size of her thighs? Dad is a lower-body guy, so he probably was able to tell just at a glance.”

Kuroha let out a sigh. “I meant they understand just how much courage Yuzu-san must have had to come here to the 23rd century. They probably wanted to give her a family that she could always know would be there for her to return to.”

Yuzu-san would normally never look serious or depressed. So I didn’t really understand just how much courage and will she must have had. But I did notice how easily she had gotten used to living in the Imose household.

As a member of our household, she took it upon herself to do all kinds of chores. Cleaning, laundry, shopping... and of course, cooking. Almost immediately after Yuzu-san started living with us, my mom had been astonished with the level of Yuzu-san’s cooking and relinquished all cooking duties to her without a second thought. Yuzu-san hadn’t been annoyed by this at all, but rather overjoyed.

“Your cooking could even transcend time, Yuzu-san! It is truly delicious,” she had remarked.

“Oh, my... Thank you. Now that I have people to cook for, I can really give it my best.”

The other day after Mom had eaten a current-day recipe that Yuzu-san had made, “2.5D Curry,” she had said something like, “Yes, I think we can rest easy now,” and my dad had nodded in response.

Rest easy, because you don’t need to cook anymore?

Anyway, Yuzu-san was already an irreplaceable part of our family,

and none of us could imagine her ever leaving.

So please, don't say stuff like that anymore, Yuzu-san! You're already a part of our family.

The interior of GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA was decorated to look like an old-fashioned elementary school classroom. There was a big blackboard where the menu was written, and the desks and chairs were made from cheap-looking wood. It wasn't a very relaxing interior, but this was the mood he was going for, it seemed.

Odaira-sensei and my dad had already hit it off as fellow adults and were engaged in a lively conversation about difficult topics like how the patterns of panties were similar to the old family crests or how famous scholars had proposed the original attributes.

"...Now then, Father, if I may proceed to the main topic at hand," Odaira-sensei said, "I have heard that today is you and Mother's anniversary. It is indeed appropriate that we have this conversation on this date — Please, give Miru-san to me."

Wait... what?

As this was being said, Miru was chowing down on some rolls, completely ignoring him.

Wait, wait, I'm sure Sensei is making a little joke to break the ice here, right? Mom and Dad also seemed to take it this way and were laughing quite uproariously.

But Kuroha was completely serious. "Absolutely, positively, no way! Not to mention how incredibly illegal that would be!"

"Alas, it seems that Kuroha-kun here is against my marriage to Miru-chan," mourned Odaira-sensei. "As the author of the classic book *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov, once said, 'The minimum age difference between me and a girl should be ten years. And preferably 30 or 40.' Our ages are 60 years apart, so there shouldn't be any problem, yes?"

"There're nothing BUT problems!" shouted Kuroha.

For the authors of current-day literature who wrote about very young or prepubescent girls, the classical literature author Vladimir Nabokov was basically deified. That was, of course, because he was the author of *Lolita*. According to Kuroha, it wasn't the kind of story I thought it was, but it is still revered as the origin of all "loli-lit" today. As an example of how much it is respected, Haruka Haruka-sensei's penname is a reference to the main character in *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert.

"In fact, I have prepared something appropriate for this special day," continued Odaira-sensei, who disappeared giddily into the back of the restaurant, then returned quickly with something in his hand. It was made of some kind of white fabric...

Is that a... wedding dress?

“I was hoping that Miru-chan could wear this.”

Miru was, as usual, engrossed in her food and didn't spare him a glance.

“Miru-chan, could you at least wear this tiara that has a veil attached to it for me?” pleaded Odaira-sensei.

“How about you put some panties on your head or something, geezer,” she replied, finally responding to him dismissively. Nodding in agreement, Odaira-sensei put the sky-blue panties in his pocket on his head like it was the most natural thing for him in the world.

The rest of us looked on, laughing heartily, and my mom and dad looked over at me. She was whispering something to him.

Hey man, don't go whispering to each other while looking at me... I'm gonna get curious...

“...What?” I asked.

“Ah, sorry about that. Just remembering the time when your mother and I got married,” said my dad, as they looked nostalgically at the wedding dress Odaira-sensei was holding. “It's been quite a long time since then, and you all have really grown up, haven't you? You always did say that Gin would be the first to get married, didn't you, Mom?”

“That I did!” she replied.

“Me? You really think so?”

“Yes. After all...” Mom shifted her gaze to the person sitting next to me, Yuzu-san. I followed along her line of sight and our eyes met.

...Wait, what?

While I was still lost in confusion, Mom stood up from her seat.

“You wear it, Yuzu-chan,” she said, taking the wedding dress's tiara from Odaira-sensei and placing it on Yuzu-san's head. Shocked, she blinked a few times. “Come on, Gin, get closer to Yuzu-chan already!” urged my mom.

“Huh?” I wasn't following the conversation.

Odaira-sensei, still panty-capped, nodded like he understood something.

“Aha, so *that* is how you think of Yuzu-kun, Mother and Father,” he said shockingly. “As Gin-kun's fiancée.”

...!

Yuzu-san's eyes went completely round, and the orange she was in the process of bringing to her mouth fell back down on her tray.

Mom and Dad smiled happily, while Miru shot a leer at Odaira-sensei, saying, “What the hell, geezer?”

Meanwhile, Kuroha...

...had completely frozen, the spoon she was bringing to her mouth budging not even an inch.

“Ha ha ha, well, calling her a fiancée might be a little premature, I

suppose,” said my Dad, laughing heartily. “Gin, that’s why you brought her to live with us after all, right? That’s very much in the tradition of us Imose men!”

“...What?” I panicked, and I looked once again at my mom and dad. They really did seem to think that Yuzu-san and I were lovers. It seemed like they really thought that their underage son had brought his girlfriend to live together under the same roof.

Hold your horses! If that’s the case, why weren’t you against it?! I thought, but it turned out that they had actually worried considerably about it, and had discussed the situation between themselves many, many times without our knowledge. They had even seriously considered that Yuzu-san should return to her home.

In the end, they hadn’t been able to come to a solid decision and had decided to watch the two of us carefully; then two months had passed. Lately the two of them had really taken to Yuzu-san’s personality, and decided that they would be happy for me to take her as my bride.

Honestly I’m amazed at how flexible you two can be sometimes, but... well, I guess the two of you eloped after all, so maybe you do kind of understand what it’s like to be young and in love...

“U-Um... I...” Yuzu-san had gone bright red and was holding her cheeks in her hands.

“Now, now... We really are overjoyed about this,” reassured my dad. “Aren’t we, Mom?” he prompted.

“Yes! We can laugh about it now, but when you were little we really worried about you guys,” Mom agreed.

“Worried about... what?” I asked.

“That you would end up in an... awkward situation with either Kuroha or Miru,” she clarified.

She didn’t say it in a particularly serious way. It sounded like she was half joking. After all, they’d said it in front of Odaira-sensei, so it couldn’t have been something they were seriously worried about.

And yet...

My parents didn’t say it aloud, but it did seem they were concerned about the fact that I wasn’t blood-related to my little sisters.

They were worried about that kind of thing between me and my sisters? Could it be that the reason they were so convinced that Yuzu-san was my lover was because they were secretly hoping that I wouldn’t make some mistake with my siblings?

A little concerned, I looked across at Kuroha. She had her mouth tightly closed and was looking out at somewhere. It almost seemed like the blood had drained from her face. Maybe it was an exaggeration, but it was like the entire world had frozen over for her.

Mom and Dad were overjoyed that they could laugh about it now, thanks to Yuzu-san. Furthermore, Odaira-sensei chimed in with, "Looks like that's the second engagement today!" making them laugh even more.

Yuzu-san was still wearing the tiara and looked like she was about to faint. It was all so sudden, she had no idea what she should do.

Well, damn... It's true that Yuzu-san and I held hands once, but I'm pretty sure that doesn't count as a proposal. Yuzu-san must be in dismay, having her feelings be ignored by everyone like this...

Meanwhile, Mom was busy talking about how she and Yuzu-san should go out shopping, or buy clothes, or eat out, or how they should go buy some flowers to celebrate, getting more and more excited.

"Oh... I-I'm sorry..." Yuzu-san could barely respond.

"Okay, now that's enough of that!" Mom cut her off sternly. "No more treating me like a stranger! I consider you my daughter no more or less than Kuroha or Miru! Gin, you're in agreement about this, right?"

"Well, sure, I think of her as family..." I said.

"The one thing I'm worried about is your wardrobe, dear. I think that you need to dress a little more fashionably as one of the women of the house."

"Then let's go to the place I always shop at, *Fashion Murata!*" I suggested.

"That store is for old men!" complained my mom. She squinted up her face in an over-exaggerated serious expression. "Listen up, Yuzu-chan. When it comes to clothing, do NOT listen to anything Gin has to say, okay?" She smiled.

"What? But I think Gin-san is very fashionable..." said Yuzu-san in my defense.

"Already siding against your mother-in-law, are you? Or maybe you're just that kind-hearted, Yuzu-chan?" Mom kept repeating the word "kind" over and over again under her breath with a serious expression on her face. "I'm so happy I'm able to have a daughter who is such a kind person..."

Yuzu-san looked at my mom, and then at me. Her lips opened ever so slightly... and I could see tears starting to well up in her eyes.

Then, suddenly, she yelled, "I-I need to go to the bathroom!" and with her face contorting, she dashed off at lightning speed, the tiara falling off of her head with a plop.

Somehow, the tears didn't seem like ones of sorrow to me.

And yet... I'm pathetic. I don't even know what I should do at a time like this.

I looked around for someone to bail me out, and met eyes with Odaira-sensei.

“Hey now, Gin-kun, what’s the matter?” he asked. “Why the little-lost-sheep look?”

“I’m usually just thinking about literature... When it comes to situations like this, I...”

“Literature, huh?” Odaira-sensei chuckled. “Gin-kun, think about the Orthodox literary style. No, in fact, any literature of any country at any point in history. Tell me, what is the greatest topic that is written about?”

“Panties, of course! Right?”

“Well, maybe just for Orthodox literature, sure, but when it comes to world literature through all time, it’s a bit different.”

“Ripping of pantyhose?” I proposed.

“That’s just 100% your own fetish.”

“...Then I give up.”

Odaira-sensei gave me a playful wink. “They write about men and women. Gin-kun, you know so little about love, and about a woman’s heart. And unless you do, you’ll never be able to write Orthodox literature.”

Does he mean I can’t write a literary love comedy unless I’ve had romantic experience myself?

“Gin-kun, you need to learn the finer points of girls and boys. Go, experience love! That is your theme!”

!!!

My body began to shake. I had been given a direct assignment by Odaira-sensei himself!

“Now hurry up and chase after Yuzu-kun this instant!”

“Yes, Sensei! Thank you very much! But can you just tell me this: Why do you go so far to show me the way?”

“Isn’t it obvious? If you and Yuzu-kun hit it off properly, I can finally peel Miru-chan and you apart from one another!” he declared.

“How about I peel off all your skin and you die?” suggested Miru. I got up and chased after Yuzu-san.

Yuzu-san had said she was going to the bathroom, but the fact that she had flown out the building seemed to indicate otherwise. When I went outside, I saw that she had gone into a nearby park.

“Yuzu-san...! Please wait up!” I yelled, my speedy legs quickly catching up to her. “Why did you run out like that?”

“Gin-san, I’m sorry. It’s just that I felt I would ruin the mood being like this...” said Yuzu-san, staring intently at me, her eyes still wet with tears.

I wasn’t exactly getting a bad vibe seeing Yuzu-san crying like this, but I supposed that everyone else was probably worried. *Maybe I should calm her down a little bit.*

“Shall we sit down for a little bit?” I asked, pointing to a bench, and we sat down beside one another.

There were no lampposts anywhere near, so it was dark. Therefore it was difficult for me to make out what kind of expression Yuzu-san had on her face.

She stayed there, quietly crying for a bit, but after a little while composed herself.

“...I’m so sorry,” she began.

“You’re sorry?”

“Yes... I’m very grateful that your mother and father would say such things about me, but I feel like they have misunderstood me. And that frightens me.”

“Misunderstood? What do you mean?” I asked.

“Yes. Your mother said that I was a kind person, you see...”

“I don’t think that’s a misunderstanding, do you? I’ve never met anyone as kind as you, Yuzu-san.”

“You’re wrong,” said Yuzu-san, almost chuckling a little at herself. She didn’t seem to me like her usual self. “Gin-san, that’s not true. I’m not kind at all...” Yuzu-san gathered her conviction. “I’m just cowardly, and mean.”

...*What?!*

“Mean? I don’t think you have a mean bone in your body, you know?” *Yuzu-san is always cheerful, and easygoing...*

“No... And I understand how it is that I’m mean,” said Yuzu-san.

She apologized again and told me a brief story about her childhood.

Yuzu-san had been abandoned at an orphanage without anything known about her birthplace. She also told me about how she had been adopted by the Mirokuins, but treated coldly by them. I already knew about the situation up to that point.

When she was little, her parents had basically rejected anything she’d said to them about her hopes or opinions. They would be angry with her from time to time, as well. “I mustn’t say what I really think.” That was drilled into her from a young age.

“Little by little, I began to act just to please the people around me.”

I was silent.

“So... I can’t say that I’m being nice.”

“I don’t feel like you are the kind of person who is just trying to make people like you at all, Yuzu-san. You say what you are thinking all the time, don’t you?”

“I do that because it’s what people expect of me. There are some things I can say, and some things I cannot. It is not being kind at all.” She went on to add that she does forget herself... every once in a

while.

This isn't a conversation I can just stop in the middle of, is it? I mean, Yuzu-san is totally talking to me about her deepest feelings that she usually wouldn't reveal...

"But Yuzu-san, your smile really brings peace to everyone."

"It's a fake smile."

"...That's a lie, I'm sure of it. Sure, there might be some smiles that aren't from the heart. But even if there are... Even if there are lots of those, I am convinced that some of your smiles are real."

Yuzu-san looked at me in silence.

"I'm sorry that Mom and Dad kind of jumped to conclusions about you being my lover and all, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm really fond of you."

"I am a far more negative person that you believe me to be, Gin-san," she said. "I feel like the more you want something, the harder it will be for you to get it. The world is not a place where good things like that just happen. And that's why I can't believe this situation I am in..."

"Don't worry. I believe that God isn't as cruel as that."

"But... I'm not worthy of it," protested Yuzu-san, shaking her head back and forth.

As I listened to her talk, I began to think back on my childhood. Unlike Yuzu-san, I had said what I thought to my parents or Kuroha all the time. I hardly ever remembered going out of my way to please people...

I wasn't able to tell her that I understood. I couldn't say something so irresponsible as that. Rather, what I could say was...

"Yuzu-san, you say that you aren't kind, but I think that you are. Going out of your way to please people, to curry favor... Putting it that way sounds bad, but if you flip the coin over to the other side, doesn't it just mean that you sympathize with others?"

Yuzu-san listened in silence.

"Here's what I'm saying: All people have a front and back to their personality, just like a coin. I believe that you are kind, Yuzu-san, and so do my parents. And isn't that all that really matters?"

"Gin-san... But..."

"I'm not like you, Yuzu-san. I say whatever comes to my mind, and I write whatever I feel like. And thanks to that, Kuroha will get angry at me and tell me I need to think more about other people's feelings. If I upload my novels to the internet, all I get is a storm of criticism."

"And thanks to that, you've become the one and only Gin-san that we all know."

"The good parts and the bad parts... Two sides of a coin, right? It's

that way for me, and it's that way for you, Yuzu-san. It's that way for everyone."

So, don't go saying such horrible things about yourself, Yuzu-san!

After I finished my speech, Yuzu-san stared at me silently for a little bit. Eventually, she lifted up her body and looked at me with her big, beaming eyes... and smiled at me like the sun.

"I'm so happy. I'm so very happy I came to this time period..." Yuzu-san began to cry. The tears that had stopped before once again began to overflow. "I'm so, so happy, Gin-san..."

Still crying, she embraced me in her arms.



She was so emotional, she squeezed me with quite a lot of force, pressing her soft body up against mine. *I apologize under the circumstances, but you do realize your very ample breasts are squeezing up against my arms? Um...*

Perhaps Yuzu-san's emotional explosion was thanks to all these years she had kept her true feelings so bottled up within her. I waited for her to stop crying, not saying anything.

"*hic*... *hic*... This is embarrassing... I'm sorry..." Yuzu-san's sobbing voice rang out in the summer's night.

It's okay, Yuzu-san. Just go on and cry all you want, I thought, but I didn't have the courage to offer her my shoulder to cry on. Just about when I started to think she'd had a good enough cry, and it was about time that we head back to the restaurant, she once again composed herself through her tears, and said something to me I never thought I would hear.

"Gin-san, you were talking about your writing before, yes? So, I assume that your ideal girl would be one that can understand your prose... right?"

"Huh? My ideal girl?!" I yelped.

"Yes. Thinking about it from your point of view, I'm sure that you would need a girl who can understand you."

"Well... I... When you put it like that, I suppose?" I said, and Yuzu-san's eyes lit up with passion.

"I... I'm going to do my best. I'm going to study until I can fully understand your writings, Gin-san. Oh, I know... One day, I'm going to translate your novels!"

"Translate them?" I repeated.

"Yes. I want the people who were born in my time period to be able to read them, as well. Hmm, what do you think about this for the preface?" Yuzu-san looked out into the air in a brief moment of thought, and then said, "Dear People of the 21st Century..."

"Ooh... That's sounds like a lot of fun, if we can pull it off," I said.

"Yes, it does."

Just imagining my stories transcending time made me feel excited.

"Hey, Gin-san. When I think about translation, even just in Japanese, the same words can have so many different meanings. For example, the word *suki*. It can be meant in so many different ways... Like, love, fondness..." Yuzu-san started with this preface, and then continued speaking into the darkness of the night. "And it's how I feel about you, Gin-san."

"...Okay," I replied. It was such a sucker punch I could barely even muster a reply.

Seconds of silence passed.

Whoa there. She just said that she... She said it, right? But how did she mean it? What kind of suki was she talking about?

If I had asked her that question, I would surely have failed at being a man. After all, in a situation like this, even for someone as dull-witted about girls' feelings such as myself, it could only be that... It was a pretty high probability.

"Yuzu-san, about that..."

"Yes...?"

"Um..." I rocked my head back and forth. *What should I say?*

"..."

"..."

I'm just not used to girls, you know? That's my excuse. When I'm writing my novels and there's a love comedy between a boy and a girl, it just comes kind of naturally, but right now my brain is totally frozen in its tracks...

Yuzu-san gazed at me with eyes that were searching for something.

"You aren't giving me an answer, I see. In that case, I wonder if you'll give me an answer if I tie you up, Gin-san?" said Yuzu-san, puckering her lips a little.

"W-Wait, what?! You have rope with you? Is this one of those, 'your body is giving me an answer' situations? Is a rope going to like, slither out of your pocket or something? Are you going to tie my arms and legs and leave me on this bench? Shouldn't we decide on a safe word first?"

"Heh heh... You've got quite the active imagination, Gin-san," said the smiling Yuzu-san mischievously, touching her hand to her mouth.

I started to laugh in embarrassment, as well. *I bet if there was someone watching us, they'd probably think we were a high school couple...*

But then, suddenly, Yuzu-san's upturned, dewy eyes began to waver, looking out beyond me. Her expression stiffened.

What is it? Concerned, I turned to look in the same direction...

At the entrance to the park stood Kuroha.

It was dark, and I wasn't able to tell what kind of expression she had plastered on her face. I could only guess at what she was feeling, and yet... I began to feel like she had seen us doing something we shouldn't have been.

Kuroha had her arms crossed and was slowly walking towards us.

"Kuroha-san..." Yuzu-san said softly.

Kuroha met Yuzu-san's eyes in silence.

I feel like I can barely breathe...

"Kuroha, were you there the whole time?" I asked.

"Not the whole time, no. I'm sorry, but it didn't seem appropriate for me to interrupt."

Since when has she been watching? What did she hear?

The three of us stared at each other without saying a word. It was uncomfortable.

I felt like I had to do something to smooth over the situation and I began turning over the things I could say, but then...

"I-I really do need to go to the bathroom now!" said Yuzu-san, standing up. She began to run toward the building where GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA was located.

It all happened so fast, I wasn't able to say a thing. After watching Yuzu-san go with a complicated look on her face, Kuroha sat down beside me.

"Yuzu-san looked extremely... happy, you know?"

"Yeah... I think so," I replied.

"She is, definitely. She threw away everything and came to the 23rd century, and now she's found a place that truly accepts her. How couldn't she be happy?"

A place that truly accepts her, huh?

"So she's that happy... That means... we helped her out, right? We did something good?" I looked at Kuroha. I was sure she would nod in agreement. But instead, she said something I didn't expect.

"What... should I do?" she said, with a strained expression on her face, almost groaning. It wasn't like she was responding to me, rather speaking to herself. "After seeing her like that, how could I say it?"

"Say what...?" I asked, and Kuroha immediately averted her eyes.

"Because I'd be stealing. I'd be stealing from her!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Dad, Mom, even Yuzu-san... That way would make them all happy. That way would have everything tied up in a bow. What in the world should I do?!" Kuroha balled her hands into fists and beat at the air. It was as if she were trying to drive away the reality that was closing in on her. "Aaah! Argh!"

Hey now! I don't get what's the problem, but calm yourself down, Kuroha!

She closed in close to my face. "That oblivious mug of yours pisses me off. I wanna punch it. Why? Why do you have to be my brother?!"

"D-Don't ask me why! I've just always been your brother, and I'm always gonna be your brother."

"And it's you who doesn't get the problem that's pissing me off!" Kuroha was piping mad, but her expression started to change.

She looked at me like some scientist considering a difficult experiment.

"...Think. Come on, come up with a solution..." she said, not speaking with anyone in particular. "Sorry, Onii-chan. I know asking *you* isn't going to be of any use," she apologized, standing up.

“Uh, don’t mind me.”

“...I’m going back now.”

Kuroha turned around promptly and headed back to the building. For some reason I felt relieved as I watched her go.

What was with that burst of emotion... seriously? And when she said “Come up with a solution...” there at the end, what was that? Some problem on her summer homework assignment? Somehow I doubt that was it.

I don’t get it.

I remembered the words Yuzu-san had said to me just a moment ago.

“And that’s how I feel about you, Gin-san.”

Yuzu-san had talked about how words like *suki* could be interpreted in different ways. I supposed it was possible that this was all some trap set by the heavens for me, and it would end up with a lame punchline like, “Oh, I meant I like to ski!”

But just thinking about it normally, well...

“So, that’s how she feels?” I said aloud to myself.

My heart began to beat faster. But then, unexpectedly, without warning, that vision popped into my head.

That vision when Kuroha had told me she loved me.

For me to be remembering it at a time like this... it must have actually happened, right?

If Kuroha had really used the word *suki* like that, to mean love... Did she mean love, like...

No matter how much I thought about it, there would never be a clear answer. Kuroha hadn’t said anything like that since.

Odaira-sensei... Love is life’s greatest mystery, isn’t it? All right, I’ve decided. This summer, I will make it my theme.

For now, I must learn what this thing called “love” is!

As I was, I was such a neophyte at romance, I could not even decide what the word *suki* that both Yuzu-san and Kuroha had said really meant. I wanted to at least be able to understand how they felt about me.

Let’s say that Yuzu-san actually loves me... Honestly, I would be really happy. I’d probably feel like I could float on air. While all the embarrassing things my parents said earlier put a bit of a damper on it, I’m sure my love gauge would fill up rapidly.

Yuzu-san called herself a negative person and said she wasn’t nice and stuff, but that’s not true. I think we could have a bright, warm romance that would be a blessing for everyone.

However, if it was Kuroha that was the one that loved me in that way...

What’s with this sudden rush of feelings?

I-I mean... I-It's not something that'd be accepted... Okay, so we're not related by blood, but I've been living together with her as part of her family since the day she was born. Literature and the real world are two different things...

But... why is it? Why is it that I don't feel like it'd be wrong...? Rather... I think I'd... be happy about it? Is it that my DNA is wired to love little sisters that way or something?

My emotions were all mixed up, and I couldn't get a handle on them. I couldn't say whether my feelings were stronger towards Yuzu-san or Kuroha. Of course I loved both of them as people, and I thought that they deserved better than someone like me, but...

I want to understand. I want to understand their feelings, and mine, as well.

Understanding people's hearts is connected to literature.

So that's what you meant when you said to go and experience love, Odaira-sensei!

"...Okay then!" I said, revving myself up, and I sprang up off the bench.

Summer vacation might have already been one-third over, but it was only then that I felt it had truly begun.

★

One day in the 23rd Century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san, it's time for today's *Gai Odaira Hour*. Let's all listen to it together!"

Transcript of *The Gai Odaira Hour* broadcast August 8th, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author), Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/
Illustrator)

"Letters from the Listeners Segment"

◆"The Proper Behavior for Japan's National Little Sister"

Prime Minister Nyamo-chan is supposed to be the citizens' blood-related little sister, but earlier she called the US leader, President Reyes, "Onii-chan." According to her character profile, isn't it inappropriate for Prime Minister Nyamo-chan to call anyone other than Japanese citizens "Onii-chan"?

I support Prime Minister Nyamo-chan's policies, but I cannot let this point stand. If she continues to go around calling foreign men "Onii-chan" willy-nilly, it gives me the impression of her as someone of loose moral character!

AICHI Prefecture, ILUVNYAMO (88 Years Old)

Haruka: “Indeed, that is unacceptable! Scandalous!”

Odaira: “How short-sighted of you. You have no idea how far ahead our Japanese government is thinking, do you?”

Haruka: “Thinking far ahead...? What might you be talking about?”

Odaira: “Only Japan has a 2D leader at this point in history. But gradually the other countries in the world are sure to imitate us and move toward 2D leaders, as well. And then, what do you think will happen?”

Haruka: “...You don’t mean...”

Odaira: “Exactly. We will get the opportunity to be called ‘Onii-chan’ by 2D leaders throughout the world. Maybe even a blonde from Russia or the Scandinavian countries. I could be called ‘Onii-chan’ by my beloved blonde-haired beauties! For my long-held dream... no, for world peace... we must support the goal of all peoples, all throughout the world, to be called ‘Onii-chan’! I repeat, this is for world peace!”

Haruka: “I see. That makes sense. But what if the other countries don’t choose a little sister as their leader, and choose an older sister or a childhood friend?”

Odaira: “We cut off relations.”

Miru: “What happened to world peace?”

Chapter 4: ○

“Summer is the season for love-nodesu!” rang out Amaneko-chan’s soprano voice through my cellphone.

“I see.”

“You see, Nii-sama? Do you really understand what the words mean that I’m saying?”

“No, not at all.”

“Honestly, Nii-sama... After you said something like that...” Amaneko-chan’s voice was filled to the brim with self-confidence. “I-Imma gonna figure out what’s really in your heart, Nii-sama!”

The “something” she was referring to had happened when Amaneko-chan had called me that night on my way home from GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA. It didn’t seem like she’d called for any particular reason; she’d just “wanted to hear Nii-sama’s sweet voice.”

Summer vacation in the Special Cultural District was mostly overlapping with the dates in Outer Japan, so Amaneko-chan was currently on her vacation. She’d told me over and over again that she wanted to come flying out to see me, but with her grandfather watching her closely, she wasn’t going to be able to.

“And I’d decided that this summer, I’d become an adult...” she mourned.

“An adult? So you’ve been paying the kiddie rate on the ferris wheel and stuff up until now?”

“Sheesh! I’m in my second year of middle school, you know?! I’m already well past that-nodesu!”

We had a lot of these kinds of frivolous conversations.

“Oh, this is a good time. I have something I want to talk with you about, Amaneko-chan,” I said without much thought.

“Whoa! Nii-sama, whatever could ish be that you want?”

“Well... you see, Odaira-sensei told me to experience love and learn more about girls’ feelings.”

“—Correct,” said Amaneko-chan, like she was the announcer on a quiz show.

“Huh? Were we doing a quiz or something? Since when?”

“Oh no, no... I just meant that what Odaira-sensei said was correct-nodesu. Nii-sama needs to think more about the feelings of girls, er, sisters, er, blood-related little sisters-nodesu.”

“Aren’t you kind of narrowing it down just to you, Amaneko-chan?”

“—Correct.”

“I think this running gag has already run its course.”

“Spoilsport. It’s not a gag. I’m being for real-nodesu!” Amaneko-chan seemed dissatisfied, but the tone of her voice changed immediately. “But basically, you are giving me an invitation. Right, Nii-sama? ‘Teach me about these things called women,’ is it?”

“No, that’s not what I said. Not women, but a girl’s heart...”

“Just leave it to me!” she yelled, and I could hear a loud *thump* through the phone from her pounding it against her chest. “Summer is the season for love-nodesu!”

And that’s how we get back to that line.

“Basically speaking, when you talk summer, you talk the beach-nodesu. And if you’re talking the beach, then you need to go for the resort hotel-nodesu.”

“...You seem to be jumping pretty far ahead there. I wonder if there’s a good public beach around...” I pondered.

“Reach around?! D-Did you just say reach-around?! You’re telling me you want me to do that to you?!”

We were just speaking on the phone, but I could almost feel her trying to grab me and eat me.

“Please lishen!” she cried.

“I-I’m listening.”

“After hearing your passion, Nii-sama, this little sister’s heart is aflame. I want to help you in any way I can-nodesu. And that’s why I’ve come up with this idea... A one-night, two-day vacation at a fancy beach resort, where you can have one mature experience after another! And we’ll go in the hot springs in the evenings. You okay with this?!”

M-Mature experience? She just proposes this all of a sudden? She must have just thought of it.

“I’m happy for the offer, but is your grandfather going to allow something like that?” I asked.

“Every August, he goes overseas-nodesu. When that happens, he lets down his guard-nodesu. And if in the worst case it gets discovered, I’ll tell him that I was having a classical literary exchange with Kuroha, who Grandfather has accepted-nodesu.”

“Yeah, but... that’s a little dangerous.”

“I thought you wanted to learn about a girl’s heart?!” screamed Amaneko-chan, as pushy as ever.

No matter how much I wanted to learn about a girl’s heart, I couldn’t just go to a resort alone together with her.

Amaneko-chan was a type of girl who I had never had around me

before. She was extremely passionate and would go after her prey like a hunter. *If I recall, didn't they used to call these types of women "meat-eaters" in the past?*

I was about to turn her down, but then I had a brilliant idea when I thought about what she'd said about having a classical literary exchange with Kuroha.

Wouldn't this be a good chance for my sisters to learn to get along a little better?

"Okay, sure," I said.

"R-Really? No backsies, okay? If you do, Imma totally gonna steal your belly button again as punishment-nodesu."

"Ha ha ha, I won't."

"All right-nodesu! I'm going to become an adult-nodesu!" yelled Amaneko-chan in glee, and I could picture her hopping up and down joyfully.

The summer sun was shining bright.

August 7th.

That was the day Amaneko-chan and I headed out for our overnight stay at the beach resort.

The sunny sky, the smell of the ocean.

The bustle of the seaside, the sound of the waves.

It all just screamed, "Welcome to the beach!"

We were staying at a hotel, and we'd chosen the beach at IZU. It was one of the sixty public beaches in the country.

In the 23rd century, it was not allowed to set foot on a beach that wasn't designated by the government. On the other hand, each of the designated public beaches was extremely large and well maintained. You could say that each one was like one huge resort.

For your information, the hotels on the beach were controlled by two mega-super-large hotel chains — A Company, which was a *gimai*-aligned corporation famous for their private rail lines and small shops, and B Company, a *jitsumai*-aligned corporation which was the largest real estate developer in the country. The rivalry between these companies was fierce, and through repeated price wars, even middle school and high school kids like us could afford the rates on our meager allowances.

Well, enough of the backstory...

The undersides of my feet were hot from the soft sand underneath them, warmed by the sun. I was only wearing a pair of swimming trunks, and I could feel the sun shining down on my whole body.

Yup, we're at the beach all right.

"Nii-sama..." Amaneko-chan was standing in front of me in her swimsuit.

In contrast to her bubbly personality, she was wearing a solid black, chic bikini. She had said that she preferred black panties, so she just must really have liked black.

It was kind of a stretch, to be sure, and maybe I couldn't say so with complete confidence, but maybe this look was working for her. Her face was still young like a child, and her black swimsuit was completely unbalanced with it, but it upended one's expectations and had a unique charm to it all.

Amaneko-chan's boundless smile was... not there. Rather, she was making quite a pout.

"Wh-What is the meaning of this?!" Her eyes blazed with sharp-angled criticism, pointing fiercely behind me.

"What is this? It's exactly as it seems," I said.

"Ahaha! You've got a cute face, so stop with the pouting already-noda."

"*Jitsumai-kun*, if you keep making an angry face like that, you'll get wrinkles, you know? You're in middle school, so that's basically old-maid territory already. You need to be mindful of keeping your skin from aging."

Behind me were Professor Choumabayashi and Odaira-sensei in his little girl form. Both of them in swimsuits.

The professor was wearing a flower print bikini with a pareu wrap-around, and it wasn't revealing at all, in a good way. It gave off a healthy youthful vibe. It matched the professor's personality quite well, I thought.

Odaira-sensei was wearing — who knows where he had bought it — a historical navy blue-colored school swimsuit. He looked just like an elementary school kid in the Heisei Era, and he had told me, "I wet myself three times just seeing myself in the mirror."

"Why did there have to be so many people coming to get in our way-nodesu?!" cried Amaneko-chan.

"I thought this would be a good chance for you to become better friends with everyone," I said.

I'd wanted to surprise Amaneko-chan, so I had invited everyone else in secret. The professor, Odaira-sensei, and also...

"You think we'd let Nii be alone together with a nutcase like you?"

"That's right! It's so much more fun with everyone all together."

Miru and Yuzu-san were here, as well.

Miru was wearing a swimming cap with cat ears, and her adolescent body, unmolested by any curves, was wrapped in a blue one-piece. Despite the brightly shining sun down on the beach, she was just as cool a customer as always.

As for Yuzu-san, w-well...

“Grrr! Hey, Ms. Boobs! Are you tryin’ to pick a fight or somethin’?!” yelled Amaneko-chan.

“Oh, my. What do you mean?”

“The size of your swimsuit-nodesu!”

“Ahh... No, I didn’t do it on purpose. It’s just that it has been so long since I’ve been to the ocean that I was mistaken about my size...”

Yuzu-san was wearing an orthodox pink bikini, but the cloth that was covering her meaty proportions was somewhat... lacking.

“Yuzu... You’re all *boyon*, *boyon* and *tayun tayun*!” said Miru.

Yeah, Miru... I can see that. I wouldn’t call it exposing herself or anything, but the amount of skin she was showing dwarfed the other girls. The gap between her kind, calm, smiling face and that sexy body below her neck left me speechless.

“‘I was mistaken about my size’ sounds like a bunch of bull to me-nodesu!” snapped Amaneko-chan. “I’m sure this is all part of your plan-nodesu. You have a good handle on your feminine weapons, I’ll give you that, you libertine floozy!”

Amaneko-chan motioned to her own breasts and butt when she said that, trying to emphasize her point.

“I do not understand what you are thinking, *Jitsumai-kun*,” said Odaira-sensei. “What part of Yuzu-san’s proportions is a weapon? Japan has, since ancient times, always been in love with the small and compact, after all. You mustn’t decide anything based on the ampleness of the bust. The true magnificence of breasts are the tasty rods stuck to the flat board... Gin-kun, this will be on your college entrance exams.”

“Got it!”

“In love with the small and compact? That’s just your own obsession, Odaira-sensei,” retorted Kuroha in her usual manner.

Everyone turned to look at her.

“...Kuroha-san...” said Amaneko-chan, walking up to stand face-to-face with her rival.

“Wh-What?”

“What exactly is that supposed to be?” accused Amaneko-chan, looking up and down Kuroha’s body.

Kuroha was the only one not wearing a swimsuit. Instead, she was wearing a thin white jacket on top and denim shorts below. And since we were at the beach, she wasn’t wearing her black stockings like normal.

“Are you actually planning on going into the ocean like that?” accused Amaneko-chan.

Kuroha looked a bit upset. “Everyone is so confident in themselves... I wonder how you can all wear swimsuits so easily...”

“Huh? Kuroha, are you embarrassed?” I asked.

“B-But, it’s been a really really long time since we went to the beach together, you know? Not since we all went to WAKAYAMA together as a family, right? Back then the both of us were still in elementary school...”

Amaneko-chan looked at Kuroha, still embarrassed to reveal her swimsuit, and snorted disdainfully.

“Virgin, virgin!” she snorted. “You might look like a cool beauty, but on the inside you’re still a little girl. A baby like you won’t be able to satisfy the ball of burning passion that is the adolescent male-nodesu! And to think I actually considered you my rival once, Kuroha-san.”

Virgin? Like the olive oil or something?

“But there is something curious... Kuroha, you are looking at Nii-sama differently than before-nodesu.”

“...!” Kuroha was taken aback.

“When I first met you, Kuroha-san, you looked at him like part of the family, but now... it’s different-nodesu.”

“H-How is it different?” asked Kuroha.

“It’s sexy.”

“Wh-Wh-Whaaat?!”

“You’re looking at him with the lustful eyes of a woman-nodesu! Those eyes want something-nodesu. How indecent. Wait, don’t tell me you’ve already...”

“There’s no way I have those kind of feelings for Onii-chan. A-Are you stupid or something?”

“Hmph. Good, seems like nothing has happened yet. And the reason why is...” Amaneko-chan stretched out her arm and pointed directly toward Kuroha. “...your eyes are wavering!”

Kuroha pursed her lips in silence at the accusation.

Amaneko-chan held the pointing finger and then blinked a few times. She seemed to be confused. “You aren’t going to say anything back? I was just throwing it out there-nodesu.”

Kuroha ignored Amaneko-chan, looking off to the side.

“What’s a swimsuit, anyway?” Kuroha muttered to herself. “I should be the one that’s most fine with it, anyway. A-After all, unlike the rest of them, w-we’ve seen each other naked all the time...”

“In that case, hurry up and take it off-noda. If you keep stalling, I’ll strip it off myself-noda,” hurried up the professor.

“F-Fine already!” Kuroha complained, finally deciding. She turned her back to me and pulled off the jacket and took off her denim shorts.

Her slim body appeared beneath the summer sun. Without any excess fat, her waist had just the right amount of curve to it, and her long beautiful legs stretched down to her feet. Her bikini was pure white, matching well with her shiny black hair.



Honestly speaking, I was taken aback.

I had seen Kuroha recently coming out from the bath wrapped in a bathtowel, but... it had been years since I had truly seen the full contours of her body like this.

All of a sudden she's really grown into a woman, hasn't she?

The bikinied Kuroha looked in my direction as if she were concerned about something. *Tell me how I look, is it?*

"Kuroha, I don't get it," I said.

"...Huh?"

"You have such a beautiful body. If I were you, I'd want to go brag about it to everyone. I don't understand how you could be embarrassed at all."

"B-But..." Kuroha leaned in a little and spoke in a quiet voice.

"But I don't have the curves that Yuzu-san does, and I'm not cute like the other girls..."

"That's not true at all. You've got a great body, and I think you are beautiful. Really I do."

"Beautiful? Th-Thank you..." said Kuroha, her cheeks reddening ever-so-slightly, and she seemed a little relieved.

All of a sudden, Amaneko-chan, Miru, and Yuzu-san's attitudes all seemed to change. The three of them came walking in between Kuroha and me. Miru was looking up at me at attention. Yuzu-san was looking at me smiling, and spun herself around. Amaneko-chan winked at me while making a sexy (at least that's what she was going for) pose.

I didn't really get what was happening, so I figured I should match Amaneko-chan's sexy pose somehow. I clasped my hands behind my head and bent my knees into the shape of an "M."

"...Nii-sama, are you doing that on purpose?" asked Amaneko-chan.

"Huh?"

"Never mind. Oh yeah, Nii-sama... I got your belly button before, so this time I want you to look at mine-nodesu," said Amaneko-chan, fluttering her eyes embarrassedly and sticking out her stomach at me. My eyes were about to be stolen by her cute belly button when...

"How about you go drown your belly button in the ocean, and the lint with it, you weirdo," snarked Miru.

"How rude can you be, cat-eared girl! If Nii-sama stays with a little sister like you, your potty mouth is going to rub off on him-nodesu! Nii-sama, when I get out of middle school and you get out of high school, how about we live together somewhere around AKIHABARA? I'm being totally serious about this-nodesu."

"Oh, my. That won't do at all," said Yuzu-san. "Gin-san is the

eldest son, so he must stay in the house and his future wife needs to move in with him. The father likes stewed dishes, and the mother is fond of Italian. Once a month you clean the underground library, and burnable trash is put out on Tuesdays and Saturdays. And you must clean up Gin-san's room once a day."

"Yuzu-san, you don't really have to do all that wifey stuff, you know?" said Kuroha. "Especially the cleaning his room part, since he'll just mess it up again immediately anyway. And if someone needs to clean it up, maybe it would better to be someone who knows where everything goes? ...I didn't mean to imply that'd be me, or anything..."

"Shut up! Both of you, shut up-nodesu!" yelled Amaneko-chan. "All of you, get away from him!"

She was making quite a spectacle.

Why did it end up like this?

"Ahaha... If you only compliment Kuro-chan, that's no good-noda," said the professor. "You've got to compliment the rest of them too-noda. You really don't understand a girl's heart, Imose-kun!"

Ah! I get it!

This was a good lesson for my current theme of learning about romance.

I'm so glad I came to the beach!

We played volleyball and split a watermelon... We did all the things you usually do when going to the beach. Since I was here, I figured I had to have some sort of "literary experience," so I decided to do that thing that happens all the time in Orthodox literature where "the main character splashes the heroine with water while at the beach." I snuck up and splashed Kuroha with the water.

A second later, I felt like perhaps I had made a grave mistake... Kuroha looked exceedingly angry. But oddly enough, she laughed back at me.

"Ooh, now you've gone and done it, Onii-chan! Then how about some of this... Take that!" She splashed me right back. I couldn't believe she would be frolicking around like this after hesitating about her swimsuit.

The splashes of water reflected the light and sparkled in the sun, and her white bikini was shining so much, it kept catching my eye, so I got repeatedly hit with the water....

And thus the enjoyable time passed quickly, and before I knew it, it had already become almost 4:00 in the afternoon. We had all gotten out of the water, and were discussing heading back to the hotel, when Professor Choumabayashi made a suspicious suggestion.

"Let's all play a game-noda!" she yelled, without any warning or

preface.

“A game? We already had fun playing volleyball and splitting a watermelon, remember?” I said.

“Oh, not those, nope...” said the Professor, flashing a wicked smile. “It’s a game that’ll make use of your writing genius, Imosekun.”

“My... writing genius?”

“Yup. For example... how about this?” The professor went on to list the game’s rules.

■ “Guess the Word Game”

The girls would all put on blindfolds and line up. Then I would write a letter on their backs. Each one would guess what it was that I’d written. The ones who got it wrong would be out, and whoever was the last girl remaining would win.

Also, so that I couldn’t go changing the right answer after the fact, I would write it on a whiteboard ahead of time.

The special feature of this game was that I wouldn’t write the correct answer verbatim. For example, if I was going to write “a girl’s breasts,” I wouldn’t just write “boobs,” I would write something more in my own style like “cc.” Otherwise it wouldn’t be much of a quiz.

“So basically I do ‘WRITE-ON-THE-BODY’ to everyone, and they try and guess the meaning?”

“Yup, that’s it. And the blindfolds will make it totally exciting-noda.”

“...B-Blindfolds...?” complained Kuroha, scrunching up her face in disapproval of this game. “Th-That’s just stupid. Why should I play a game like that?”

“You have to wear a blindfold because those are the rules, and because that’s how the game will be fun for everyone,” answered the professor.

“But...”

“Fufufu...” Amaneko-chan saw an opening. “If you don’t want to play it, then you don’t have to-nodesu. Blindfolded... Robbed of your vision... With Nii-sama’s finger tracing along your sun-heated back... Just thinking about it makes me swoon-nodesu!”

“This is just like that erotic novel you keep hidden in the bottom of your dresser, Nee... *The Step-Brother’s Fingerwork*,” said Miru.

“Wh...” Kuroha’s face went bright red.

“K-Kuroha-san, you read things like that?!” cried Amaneko-chan. “Blue girl! Blue girl! Somebody call the police, we’ve found a blue girl in our midst-nodesu! Arrest her this instant!”

“Ahaha, *La Blue Girl* is a classic-noda!”

“I-I don’t... read erotic novels! Damn it!” yelled Kuroha, quite unconvincingly.

Amaneko-chan saw her opening and continued to pressure Kuroha. “Well, if you’re against playing, then I suppose that means you’re accepting your defeat...” she chuckled, puffing out her black-bikini’d chest in a satisfied manner.

Hmm, Amaneko-chan probably would win at this, wouldn’t she? She considers my writing the “prose of the future” and understands it more than anyone else.

“In the end, no *gimai* can win against a *jitsumai* like me-nodesu!” she declared.

Ahh, Amaneko-chan... There you go again, saying something so combative...

Just on cue, Kuroha looked her back straight in the eye. “It seems like someone needs to teach that mouth of yours how to shut up...”

Amaneko-chan’s mouth snapped shut.

I suppose that they were a little better than they’d been the first time they had met, but my hopes of them actually getting along were fully dashed.

Still, everyone else thought the game sounded like fun, and decided to participate. *We’ll all play it together!* they said.

Everyone took a blindfold from the professor, while I took a small whiteboard. I had to write the right answer on it ahead of time.

I wonder what I should do... I thought, but then I saw Kuroha with a somewhat complex look on her face.

“We’ve all decided to play the game, so let’s have fun, Kuroha,” I said.

“Yeah...”

“Is it really that bad? It’s just a game. Take it easy and have fun with it.”

“...But it’s not,” said Kuroha, not just dissatisfied but also seemingly thinking about something. She was in her “Great Detective Kuroha” mode that she goes into sometimes.

Kuroha moved away from me and approached the professor.

“Professor, you also stuck your neck in the last time I went at it with that girl at the ‘Tower of Culture,’ didn’t you?” remarked Kuroha.

“Hey, what’s with that way of putting it? You complaining about it or something-noda?” the professor asked.

“And this time, as well, with you proposing this game...” continued Kuroha. “Are you trying to research how well Onii-chan fits with the various girls around him?”

“...Whaaat?” let out the professor with a howl, grabbing her stomach in a fit of laughter. “That’s a laugh-noda! What the heck! Why in the world would I have to do something like that?! I have not

the slightest interest in 3D guys-noda!”

Kuroha seemed like she had something to say, but kept it to herself, just looking at the professor with eyes filled with questions. The professor smiled the entire time.

“Fine. I’ll play your little game,” concluded Kuroha, nodding a little bit, taking the blindfold, and moving away from the professor.

.....—

The girls all lined up on the edge of the beach. They all had their blindfolds on already.

—Blindfolded, in swimsuits. I looked at each of them in turn.

Kuroha seemed somehow uneasy, and she was making a strained face. Amaneko-chan was grinning like crazy. Yuzu-san was smiling, and Miru was the same as always. The professor was laughing heartily and Odaira-sensei was overjoyed, saying, “This kind of game is pretty good, too!”

—I’ll say it again, just in case you missed it. They were all blindfolded, in swimsuits.

.....

“I can feel it. Nii’s totally raping us with his eyes,” said Miru.

“Nii-sama, stare at me all you want from head to toe-nodesu!” yelled Amaneko-chan.

“Oh, can I?” I said. “I was just overflowing with curiosity when I was a kid, and I loved to peak underneath the skirts of mannequins. But now that I’m older, I’ve kind of forgotten the joy of being a kid... This is a good chance, then. Let me try and relive how I felt back then!”

I promptly got down on all fours on the sand. With my line of sight lowered, my focus went naturally to everyone’s lower bodies. I implore you to just imagine the visage that greeted me.

A row of young, healthy thighs, young, healthy thighs, young, healthy thighs... An inundation of skin color. Yuzu-san’s thighs that seemed to almost burst out... The professor and Amaneko-chan’s thighs that were thin and supple, and Kuroha’s thighs that were just right in between...

“Onii-chan... Don’t tell me you’re actually looking at our lower bodies from below...” said Kuroha.

“I am, actually.”

“Y-You *hentai*! Stop that right now!” said Kuroha, grabbing her own shoulders and squirming in embarrassment.

“Wow, what a sight...” I sighed.

“Ahahaha! Imose-kun, you’re such a dirty old man-noda!” laughed the professor.

“Okay, and now for the backsides!” I shuffled around on all-fours like a dog, getting behind everyone.

This time it was: Nice butt, nice butt, nice butt, nice butt...

Sure, they were all butts, but each one had its own personality. One couldn't understate how important this was. For example, Kuroha's butt was meaty but taut. A very Japanese butt. I could feel a reserved sexiness emanating from it. On the other hand, Yuzu-san's half-Caucasian butt was full and thick. Its power nearly overwhelmed me, causing my head to spin.



“How strange. The picture of all of you lined up in swimsuits pales in comparison to the vision of all your thighs or butts lined up. Perhaps each of your body parts converts into some erotic *objet*? The lower-body-man teachings my father drilled into me are stirring...”

“...Eh? Erotic *objet*? Don’t go saying something like that like it’s something healthy!” whined Kuroha.

“Oh my, Gin-san,” remarked Yuzu-san. “My brother had some manga where a woman would be stuck in a wall with only her backside sticking out... I wonder if that would be considered an erotic *objet de art*? My brother would always look at it and mutter, ‘I wish that would happen to me...’ and start to drool.”

“Just a butt sticking out a wall... Now that’s art if I ever heard of it!”

“Sh-Sheesh, everyone, give it a rest already!” yelled Kuroha.

Seeing everyone like this, a new idea began to well up from within me. *I want to be blindfolded, as well!*

After hearing so much about Yuzu-san’s brother, perhaps I wanted to act like him. He had been quite the artist, it seemed. For example, if Yuzu-san and he had been watching TV together in their living room, he would all of a sudden put on a blindfold, tie his arms and legs, and roll himself over to the corner of the room like that.

“If there were something rolling around in my living room like that, it’d be like some kind of horror movie!” Kuroha had remarked.

“No no, Kuroha. It’s art,” I had replied. Art and literature are both rooted in the same place.

I actually had suspected something like this might happen, so I had already borrowed a blindfold from the professor. I stood up and covered my eyes with the blindfold without telling the others.

My field of vision went pitch black.

I stretched out my arms, opening and closing my fists, grabbing the air in front of me. As I went to return my open palms to my chest...

squeeze

...Huh? The palms of my hands have hit something... or rather, have grabbed something?

“...a...” I heard someone let out a groan.

What could these soft things be? They were just about the right size to fit in my hands, not too big, nor too small. It was almost like they were made to fit the size of my hands.

squeeze squeeze

“...nn...” The person gasped.

Hmm, I can’t say for sure, but that voice... It sounds like a voice I’ve heard since I was very little... I thought, but then in that instance...

ka-bam

My brain was scrambled. The world was spinning. It was like something had bashed into my head.

In the pitch-black darkness, I saw stars flying by.

Kinda like this:

☆■ ■ ☆■

■ ■ ☆ ■ ■

■ ☆ ■ ■ ■

Oooh, stars... They're so pretty and sparkly... But just stars seems kind of... lonely...

...

Well, putting all that aside, right now it seemed I had groped a girl's boobs from behind and was being beaten because of it.

Still, not knowing who it was that was punching me, I slowly sank into the sand...

.....—

As for the all-important game, it was settled quite quickly. Starting with the conclusion, only one of the girls answered correctly in the very first round.

The second we started, Yuzu-san, Odaira-sensei, Miru, and the professor all lost immediately. Not a single one of them came even close to the right answer.

All that was left were Kuroha and Amaneko-chan. Per the professor's suggestion, they would both state their answers before announcing the winner. The character that I had written was...

○

"..." Kuroha was quiet.

"I see-nodesu," nodded Amaneko-chan.

"It's something that I'm thinking about really strongly right now," I added.

"...Romance," answered Kuroha, with a strained look on her face.

"Why do you think this character is 'romance'?" I asked.

"...I-I don't really know exactly... Since you said it was something you're thinking really strongly about... Didn't Odaira-sensei tell you to go experience love?"

"...Amazing. You really pay close attention to me, Kuroha. Thank you," I said, feeling happy.

"Y-You don't have to go and thank me o-or anything..." Perhaps she was a little embarrassed, since her cheeks blushed a tad.

"Oh, my... Gin-san. Did Kuroha get the correct answer?" asked Yuzu-san. Everyone else figured that she had gotten it correct.

"Hee hee hee... Kuroha-san, you are so naive-nodesu. Nii-sama is thinking of something far more global than you are, Kuroha-san. Not a day goes by when he is not thinking of the future of this planet-

nodesu. This character he wrote... I'll tell you what it is..." Amaneko-chan, still blindfolded, proclaimed matter-of-factly, "It's Earsh-nodesu!"

"Earsh?" everyone replied, confused.

"E-Earth-nodesu!"

Oh, her lisp was acting up again.

"At first I thought it was the Japanese flag, but your vision goes beyond just Japan, Nii-sama. The scale is so much bigger... I am sure that your philosophy will spread its wings across the entire globe-nodesu!"

"What are you talking about?" scoffed Kuroha. "There's no way that Onii-chan would be thinking about stuff like that."

"Actually, she was correct," I said.

"...What?" Kuroha panicked and took off her blindfold, running up to the whiteboard that was stuck in the sand, and turning it over.

○ (Answer: The Earth)

"B..." Kuroha couldn't finish even a word.

"I did it-nodesu! This is the power of the *jitsumai*-nodesu!" Amaneko-chan began jumping up and down in celebration, still blindfolded.

"Onii-chan... why did you write this?" pleaded Kuroha.

"I was thinking that the stars alone by themselves would be lonely. They require Mother Earth to be there, as well."

"...Wh-Whaaaaaaa?! I don't get it at all!"

"Oh my, Gin-san... You are quite the dreamer, it seems," said Yuzu-san.

"He's not a dreamer-nodesu. He's a global citizen-nodesu!"

Kuroha stared over at Amaneko-chan with a stunned look on her face.

"I've been wondering now for a while... How is it that you understand how he thinks so well?" Kuroha asked, almost as if in pain, but still picking a fight.

Honestly I wonder that myself. Maybe it really is because of our blood relation?

"Nii-sama's writing will one day become the writing of the entire world-nodesu," said Amaneko-chan confidently. "I understand now why the 'messenger of God' came to guide me-nodesu. It was so that Nii-sama and I could create the language of the world-nodesu."

Amaneko-chan had met this "messenger of God" a number of years ago, or rather that was something she had convinced herself had happened.

After she brought that story back up, the rest of us didn't really know how to respond, and there was a moment of awkward silence while Amaneko-chan kept proudly standing there, gloating.

Meanwhile the professor was looking at Amaneko-chan with a serious look on her face. “Aha. As I suspected, it was *Jitsumai*-chan here...”

Yeah, Amaneko-chan is my jitsumai, that’s true... So?

Amaneko-chan suddenly grabbed my arms in hers. “Nii-sama, I won-nodesu! The one you should be with is clear now. I can understand your prose, after all. How about as a memento of my victory, we head on over to that gap there between those two yachts... and then me and you, wes can...” Amaneko-chan pointed over to where a number of yachts were moored.

Why would we go over there? I thought, but Kuroha and the others came up next to us and started to argue with her.

I was completely ignored.

The sun had started to set off on the horizon. *Going to the beach sure is fun*, I thought.

★

★ ★ ★ □□※■●□ 2 3 ★☆▼▼□□ ★ ★ ★

HMmm.

Observing Amaneko Makoto like this, I can tell the effect that my brother had on her from what he did... IT seems that they believe the reason she is able to understand Gin Imose’s prose IS because of their blood relation, but it is ACTually because of my brother’s failed attempt at manipulating her memory.

To think she would even get the mental ability to understand “○ (Earsh)”... HONestly! That is why I was so against his plan to erase Amaneko Makoto and majorly affect Gin Imose!

IN the end, it was a failure, and so shouldn’t we leave history to take its natural course?

We Pantyhose Party Members’ prime tenant is “Live Together With People,” but my BROther has twisted the interpretation and directly interfered with humanity’s ancient ancestors... What a BOther.

Also of note is how Amaneko Makoto is so different from Kuroha Imose or Yuzu Mirokuin... SHE is far more straight with her feelings. That is much closer to my impression of ancient humans.

IS she that open and frank just to Gin Imose, or is that just a unique part of her personality? AH, I know... Let me see what Amaneko Makoto was like before she met Gin Imose?

There I go again... This is such a BAd habit of mine.

.....

Well, a little bit won’t hurt, will it?

Let’s just go and see——

☆□♂♀∞◆▼▼

Chapter 5: God

—*That detective I hired got me some info on my brother!*

It was on her way home from school.

Amaneko was wearing her light-blue colored sailor school uniform, running as fast as she could down the Heisei or maybe Showa Era tinged streets of the Special Cultural District. It turned out that her real brother had uploaded a novel to the internet, so it was no wonder that she was so curious. She wanted to get home as fast as she could and read Gin's work right away.

Crossing the street to the classic street crossing melody, passing by a run-down candy store with cheetah-like speed, she blazed into a sharp left at an intersection, just skirting the concrete block wall, and

—
“Wawa!!”

Whoops! She'd nearly barreled straight into a sign that said “Be careful with cars when going home from school,” written in kanji as was typical of the Special Cultural District.

“More like ‘be careful of you’-nodesu!” complained Amaneko, making a kicking gesture toward the sign. “...Ah...”

She'd caught herself doing something she shouldn't have.

If my grandfather saw me doing something like this, he'd be sure to scold me. With visions of her grandfather's stern-looking face coming to mind, she hurriedly straightened up her posture. Her mood suddenly soured. She didn't want to think about her grandfather right now.

No matter how many times I ask him, he'll never let me meet my brother...

Her grandfather had strong opinions about the fact that Gin was a “2.5D person.” *Mom, Dad, and I live together, so why does Gin have to live apart from us? How pointlessly cruel...* she thought to herself. *If I can, I want to escape from my grandfather's watch and leave the Special Cultural District.*

I want to save Gin...

Nii-sama, please wait a little longer for me-nodesu. I'm going to where you are-nodesu! Amaneko balled her hand into a tight fist, and set off once again at high speed down the road.

The Special Cultural District, whose full name in Outer Japan was actually “ARIAKE SPECIAL CULTURAL DISTRICT,” had been

designated in the Tokyo Bay area at the end of the 21st century. It had happened right at the same time as when the government had set the “Current-day Writing” laws in place. For the people who’d felt like it was important for Japan to preserve the older culture, the decision of the government had not been something they could easily accept. Cultural preservation groups had started to flourish, and a certain group of influential people had managed to obtain something extremely rare in the history of Japan: an independently governed district.

The head of the Makoto household, Amaneko’s grandfather, was in fact the grandson of one of those influential people. For a district so soaked in the influence of olden times, a local family of such distinction held powerful sway.

And I hate it all! So, so much-nodesu! thought Amaneko from the bottom of her heart. She hated everything she was running past. The streets filled with signs written in kanji... The houses with their tiled roofs... And most especially...

“Let’s Restore Traditional Culture to Outer Japan!” proclaimed the banner plastered on the sound truck.

...she hated that most of all.

Today in history class she learned about “Special Cultural District” history yet again. *It’s so stupid how Japanese history just switches in the middle to “Special Cultural District” history, like nothing happened. Like the Special Cultural District is the “proper” Japan or something. If you compare the land area or population, it’s barely even a speck of the entire country!*

I can’t let myself get poisoned by this place’s thinking. I need to have a more global outlook.

Because I have a destiny.

A number of years ago, Amaneko had been given a mission from a “Messenger of God” who appeared in her backyard, telling her to “Create new words.”

It wasn’t a dream. It wasn’t a delusion... It was real. Back then I wondered why I was the one given the message, but now I know.

The Messenger of God was responding to the anger I felt toward the old-fashioned Special Cultural District. It’s my anger that will power the revolution to create a brand-new world.

The moment that Amaneko had met the Messenger of God, she had started to feel like she was glad she was possessed by something.

Soon after recalling that memory, her home started to come into view. It was a traditional Japanese mansion surrounded by trees. It was such a fancy place that the locals called it “The Makoto Estate,” and it was located on quite a large parcel of land.

“...Hm? What’s that?” asked Amaneko, arching her eyebrows

quizzically.

A suspicious group had gathered near the house gates. It contained a total of five people. All in their twenties, and all insufferable men.

It's probably people in that "Resurrect Kanji Committee" that my grandfather leads.

Amaneko disliked anyone who would join one of those colluding groups like the Resurrect Kanji Committee. *Don't they have the will to think of their own goals and strive for them independently? That way's totally cooler*, thought Amaneko, despite the fact that there wasn't much difference between them and the New Word Order she was a member of, other than what side of the spectrum they were on.

In order to avoid the people from the Resurrect Kanji Committee, Amaneko decided to enter through the rear gate instead of the main gate. She slipped behind the men, circled around the wall, and headed toward the rear of the estate, when...

"You there, girl!"

Amaneko stopped in her tracks when a voice called out to her from behind. She turned around and saw a young man standing there. He seemed to be about 20 years old, and was wearing a really old-fashioned men's military outfit. Even for the retro-leaning fashion tendencies of the Special Cultural District, he stood out.

Another odd thing about him was that he didn't look straight ahead, but seemed to be staring upward at an angle.

"Y-Yikes..." muttered Amaneko. *Th-This guy is totally bad news-nodesu. I can tell he's completely off in his own little world-nodesu.*

"I would like to inquire if this is the residence of Masamune Makoto," the man said. "Might you be a member of the Makoto family?"

Amaneko didn't want to deal with this clearly suspicious individual, but she was afraid that she might set him off by completely ignoring him. She knew who he was asking for; Masamune Makoto was the name of Amaneko's grandfather.

"...Yes, I am..." started Amaneko. "And who might you be? Are you a member of the Resurrect Kanji Committee?"

"To the contrary! I am not such a small-fry as to be a member of the Resurrect Kanji Committee," the man said stiffly, speaking in a manner that didn't fit the time he was in. "I believe myself to be of quite the similar mindset to Sir Masamune, and have come to greet him as one of equal mind."

Amaneko's grandfather was famous around this area. It went without saying, but he was not the kind of person that you could just meet easily.

And this guy just shows up asking to meet him? I wonder if the

summer heat is behind weirdos like him showing up... thought Amaneko, feeling a chill run down her spine.

She thought about ignoring the man and entering the house, but while she was deciding whether she should, more men showed up. Amaneko was still just in middle school, so being surrounded by men was a scary experience for her. She shrunk back, barely letting out a whimper.

"Shukumei-san, she's scared," suggested one of the young man's followers, standing at his side. "Don't you think you should introduce yourself first?"

"My name is not Shukumei! It is Sadame!" barked the young man who called himself Sadame.

"Oh, my bad," apologized the follower. "It's just that you spell it with the kanji for 'fate,' *shukumei*, so it's confusing..."

"It is a fitting kanji spelling for the name of someone as great as I!" continued Sadame. "Once I moved here to the Special Cultural District, I took over 30 hours to decide on it, I'll have you know!"

"Uh... sure."

So he writes his name using kanji for "fate," but reads it as Sadame, which means "rule"...

"...heh," chuckled Amaneko, who couldn't help but laugh at the young man's terrible taste. *How conceited can you get?*

"You there, girl," the man snapped. "Did you just laugh?"

"Oh, no... I was just thinking how creative it was to use such beautiful kanji for your name-nodesu," lied Amaneko. "Is that related to your line of work, perhaps?"

"Indeed. I am a wordsmith, a writer."

"Have you been published?"

"..." Sadame started to look around here and there. "Well, right now I... I am waiting for an appropriate time, you could say. It is necessary to obtain acclaim, and it is not as if one can unleash upon the world so many numerous great works the moment he is born. Rather, I have taken up a position as an instructor at a local supplementary educational institution here in this land which my great writing itself gave birth to, as a cover to hide my true self from the world."

Amaneko didn't know what to make of that. "Well, that was an increeeedibly roundabout way of saying that you're working at a cram school while trying to be an author, right?"

"I... suppose that would be another way to put it," Sadame answered reluctantly.

"Sadame-san's never had a proper job before in his entire life! What a turnaround he's made, you know?" prodded the follower.

"H-Hey! Be not so pithy in your statements! I was not

unemployed, I was *persecuted* for my literary beliefs!”

“You seem pretty okay being surrounded by elementary school girls at the cram school calling you ‘Sensei! Sensei!’ if you ask me,” the follower said. “You sure that’s not where your tastes lie?”

“Fool! I prefer older women! ...Wait, I mean that I do not care for such trifles. Though there may be genres I prefer, one could say that I only have eyes for literature!”

“Oh, yeah, you’ve got a little sister or something, right, Sadame? That must be why you don’t like younger girls. But you should give up on that married woman you work with, seriously. I know you’re obsessed with her, but...”

“I-I am not obsessed in the slightest! I merely said that the woman who already had a spouse and yet no children had a graceful air about her!”

As the conversation progressed, Amaneko learned that these men all had the wish to become authors, and that they had met in one of the Special Cultural District’s writers’ cafes. Aside from Sadame, they said that all of them had been born in the Special Cultural District.

Amaneko wished she could hurry up and enter her house, but she missed her chance to slip away as the men continued chatting.

“We and Sadame-san are thinking of creating a literary ‘restoration of the world,’” one of the followers said proudly.

“...Restoring the world, you say?” replied Amaneko.

The man nodded and then his face turned to an expression of disgust. “In Outer Japan, the loathsome ‘Orthodox’ literature runs rampant. We might live in the Special Cultural District, but we still feel it must be weeded out.”

That was exactly what the typical person in the Special Cultural District would say.

That was exactly the type of person that Amaneko hated the most in the entire world.

“We’re going to change the world of literature with our pens,” the follower went on. “And then one day, that will end up changing Japan itself. Isn’t that right, Sadame-san?”

“Precisely,” Sadame said smugly. “It was the legacy of myself and my great ancestor, the authors of *The 21st Century*, which was the origin of the forces that gave birth to this very Special Cultural District. Great words bear great things. By being ever unflagging in our embrace of such a legacy, we do impart the seeds of even greater change.”

Wh-What in the world is this person talking about? Amaneko thought incredulously. *It’s almost like he thinks that something he wrote actually created the Special Cultural District...*

“Sadame-san, you really need to do something about those

delusions of yours..." said one of the followers. "But we all believe in your cause!"

The men all started to ignore the taken-aback Amaneko and began to speak with agitation among themselves.

"Let's destroy that damn Orthodox style!"

"How in the world did crap like that become mainstream?"

"It was all *Oniaka's* fault... If it hadn't been for that, then..."

"The worst kind of filth..."

It was clear to Amaneko that they felt *Oniaka* and the Orthodox literary style were their enemy. It reminded her of part of the personal data that the detective she had hired had gotten on Gin.

If I recall, Nii-sama really, really loves Oniaka and the Orthodox literary style-nodesu. How dare they badmouth it like that... A wave of fury suddenly washed over Amaneko's entire body.

"...What do you people know about *Oniaka* anyway?" yelled Amaneko, suddenly. "It's a book about familial love, I'll have you know!"

The men all turned to face her.

"What do we know about it? We know everything about it. We know that it's idiotic and has not even a hint of value as a piece of literature," said one of them.

"Have *you* actually read it? Then you should realize just how lucky you are to have been born here in the Special Cultural District. This is the only place where you can find normal people who haven't been tainted by the evil effects of that chicken scratch," continued another.

Amaneko was starting to feel like these people were belittling her brother Gin. *This is exactly why I can't stand people from the Special Cultural District!*

And yet one of the men, the one named Sadame, was keeping his mouth shut.

"The Orthodox style should just be wiped off the face of the Earth... Sadame-san, you're awfully quiet for some reason, but you think so too, right?"

Sadame glanced at the man with his arms crossed, and muttered, "It's a quandary."

"...Huh?" The men didn't seem to have expected this answer from him at all.

"Yes, for I was of precisely that opinion not long ago... and yet..."

"What are you saying?" the follower asked, gaping.

"It is my great wish to change this Japan that has been so brutally colored over with the taint of the Orthodox Literary style, and to return the literature of the past. However, perhaps, if only a little bit... if only a small, insignificant portion that would have no affect upon

the rightful schools... if just such an amount of the Orthodox style were to remain, perhaps that would not be such a bad thing.”

The men were all shocked.

“Sadame-san, this is unexpected from you. I thought that you hated the Orthodox style the most.”

“Yes... But, well... Even I can take the advice of others, sometimes,” said Sadame, his eyes looking away far in the distance, as if he was thinking about someone.

The men didn’t have a response to that, but it was just a moment until they were back to, “Nah, definitely gotta wipe it out,” and, “The Orthodox style belongs in the gutter, obviously.” And of course, once they started talking like that, it wasn’t long until they switched to everyone’s favorite conversational topic in the Special Cultural District, making discriminatory remarks about people from Outer Japan.

Amaneko didn’t say a thing and headed toward the rear entrance. The men were saying something to her from behind, but she didn’t care anymore. She couldn’t stand to hear any more of their conversation. It was exactly this kind of thing that made her hate the Special Cultural District so much. It was filled with conservative, exclusivist, hard-headed idiots like them.

And her grandfather was like a symbol of them all, drawing rabble like that to his house. Ever since she was little, she’d seen men like that—the very epitome of the Special Cultural District. She was sick and tired of it.

But that Sadame guy, with his weird bedhead hair... He was just a little bit different than those other idiots...

He must have been someone who came from Outer Japan. Outer Japan can’t be as conservative as this place, I bet. The environment you’re born and raised in definitely has a major impact, thought Amaneko. If my family weren’t here in the Special Cultural District, but were in Outer Japan, then...

Then my grandfather might not be so prejudiced, and he would easily let me go see Gin.

Then we might all be able to live together in happiness.

I can’t stand the Special Cultural District. Curse my fate for being born here.

Even as her mood grew darker, there was yet a shining light that supported her.

“Nii-sama...”

I wonder what kind of person you are? I got some info from the detective, but it didn’t really give me a full picture.

Proportionate to her hatred of the Special Cultural District were Amaneko’s feelings for Gin, whom she had not yet even met. Arriving

back in her room, she quickly booted up her PC. She opened up the novel site that the detective had told her about, and started to read Gin's novel——

■ = →▷ ◀◻◻ = YAY ←☆♪☆♪

(Translator's Note: A black pair of stockings is wrapping around a daikon radish chowing down, when his little sister comes by happily.)

"Th-This is...!"

Gin's prose became a torrent, pouring into Amaneko's eyes.

Despite so much of it being so far removed from what would be considered present day Japanese, Amaneko was somehow able to comprehend most of it. She figured it had to be because they were related. She felt like something truly incredible was coming from Gin's novel displayed on her monitor.

Something shocking.

Something fateful.

This... This is the prose of the future!

Tears rolled freely down Amaneko's face.

Gin is trying to create new words, just like I am! He posted such a challenging new novel online... He's facing against the world all by himself!

How... how individualist!

A destroyer of the now!

A creator, through and through!

Amaneko clutched her little chest...

kathump, kathump, kathump

Her heart was beating so fast, it felt like it would break.

Nii-sama, I... Imma gonna...

She quickly opened up her email software, and without even a second glance, wrote Gin a message.

To: Nii-sama. From: Your "real" little sister.

She had never met him. She had never spoken with him. But she couldn't help but be swept away.

You and me, Gin... We're going to create the future, together. And to make that happen, one day I'm gonna cast off this place I'm in and go to see you.

——*Please wait for me until then, Nii-sama...*

To Amaneko, Gin had become someone who had opened up a door for her to another world. He had become like a god to her.



One day in the 23rd Century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha! Yuzu-san! In this month's *Literary Gal*, there's an article about a day in the life of Odaira-sensei! What a find this is!"

"Oh, my. If you do the same things that Sensei does each day, you might get closer to becoming an author, yes?" said Yuzu-san.

"Yuzu-san, that's a great idea!" I replied.

"...Do I really have to say it?" said a skeptical Kuroha. "That's a bad idea. Well, let's just see what his day is like first, okay?"

■ Special Edition *Literary Gal* September 2202

"A Day in the Life of Gai Odaira"

6:00

Rise.

Say good morning to the 20 little sisters in my head. From my debut work's Azu to my latest work's Rin, the order in which I greet them is fixed, but they always try to cut in line with one another and start arguing.

Scream at them.

8:30

After breakfast, to get my day's motivation, I put a pair of panties on my head. I have them on a daily rotation, and today's pair is polka-dotted.

Start writing.

13:00

After lunch, in order to familiarize myself with the classic arts, I partake in some old anime. Today I will watch an anime that aired from January to December of 1992 called *Mama is a 4th Grader*. Just seeing the title makes me giddy, and I have friendly chats with the little sisters in my head one after another.

16:00

I take some time out during my writing to cast a vote for the historic award that's been going for over 200 years, the "Moe Game Award."

In order to have the game I want to win first place, I go on the 'net and diss the rival games.

19:30

After dinner, I email Miru-chan.

“WHAT DID YOU EAT FOR DINNER?”

It's already become routine for me to email her three times a day, once after breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

She doesn't reply.

22:00

“COULD YOU AT LEAST SEND A REPLY?”

I start another email like that to Miru-chan and then end up with 20 pages. I send it off.

23:30

I receive a response from Miru-chan and am overjoyed.

It's just 4 letters.

“U RU SA I”

As Japanese is a language where the same letters can have many different meanings, I look up the word “urusai” in a dictionary.

[urusai] :

1. noisy; (too) loud.
2. annoying; bothersome; troublesome; vexing; worrisome; pesky
3. persistent; bothersome

It seems like it is going to be a long night.

Chapter 6: Love Advice

I feel like the impression one gets from watching fireworks can vary considerably depending on the situation of the person doing the viewing. It can be something fun, or something beautiful, or something subtle and profound... or sometimes, even something sentimental.

I still remember the fireworks I saw that night, and all the feelings that came with them. The balls of light above the sea, leaving a thin trail behind them as they rose toward the heavens...

whizwhizwhizwhizwhizwhiz... bang!

In an instant, the night sky was lit up by a beautiful blossoming circle...

Shooting off fireworks — real ones, at that.

In the current day, thanks to the advancement of technology, we had 3D holographic fireworks or 2D fireworks that were projected onto giant screens. The actual pyrotechnic fireworks that had been used long in the past were now quite a rarity and very special.

Carried on the sea breeze, the smell of gunpowder wafted toward me. *Ah, so elegant...*

I couldn't help myself, so I wrote this in the sand:

◎~~~~

"At first I thought it was a ladle, but I suppose it's very much in your style, Onii-chan. I guess it's one of your easier-to-understand ones," said Kuroha.

"Nii, what's that supposed to be? Sperm?" asked Miru.

"Sheesh, Miru!" scolded her sister.

Night had fallen, and we were enjoying fireworks from the beach. Today and for the next two days there would be fireworks displays. It was one of the reasons we had chosen this beach.

There were old little shops lined up along the street, and plenty of people around, so it had a little bit of a festival atmosphere. As it wasn't something I usually got to experience in my everyday life, I felt like I was walking on air.

Who could have believed it? We were enjoying a midsummer's night to its fullest.

—Twenty minutes later.

"Yuzu-san, here's your drink," I said. "They were out of orange juice, so I got you a 'Nyamo-chan's Tropical Special.'"

“Oh, my. Thank you very much.”

I handed Yuzu-san a can of juice I'd bought from a vending machine with a picture of 2D Prime Minister Nyamo-chan on it. This was one variety of character merchandise, and the profits went to help fund the government.

We were sitting next to each other in the sand, having moved a little bit away from the crowds, looking up at the fireworks as they danced in the night sky. It was only the two of us.

At first, I was just happy that we were all able to view the fireworks together. Miru, always moving at her own pace, had quickly gotten bored with them and wandered off somewhere. Once Miru left, of course Odaira-sensei followed behind her. And once Kuroha noticed, she ran off after them, as well, looking worried.

Amaneko-chan stayed with me for a while, but she was so curious about the little shops from Outer Japan that she was quickly drawn away from us by them... and before I knew it, I could no longer see where she had gone off to. The professor got an emergency message about something to do with her ongoing research, and said she had to go and make a call before disappearing.

And that was how Yuzu-san and I ended up alone together.

The fireworks danced up in the night sky... White, blue, purple, and...

“Oh, my... Pink. Gin-san, that one was like a pink flower, and oh so pretty. I love pink flowers,” said Yuzu-san, smiling and having fun.

“This is my first time ever watching fireworks together with a girl. Is it the first time for you too, Yuzu-san?”

“Yes, it's my first time. I'm glad it was with you, Gin-san,” said Yuzu-san, looking downwards in embarrassment. She was so cute, you couldn't take your eyes off her.

Yuzu-san was a flower beautiful enough to rival the fireworks themselves, but next to her was someone that was strangely calm.

...Yes, if someone were to look at us right now, I bet they'd think that we had quite the romantic mood going on...

After the incident at “GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA” where my parents had talked about Yuzu-san and my relationship in that way, and then Yuzu-san had told me that she loved me... it wouldn't have been strange for us to actually become lovers, really. But our relationship hadn't progressed at all since then.

I still wasn't convinced that those were Yuzu-san's true feelings, and I hadn't been able to come up with an answer to my own feelings, either. I was afraid of doing something that ended up being insincere. But my parents had gone and said all that, so one day I was going to have to make things clear, one way or the other.

No, wait... “One day”? Why take it so slow? Why can't I just jump

right into it?

Looking at Yuzu-san's face, I could see her smiling in her usual, calm way. But, and perhaps it was just me seeing things, I felt like she was perhaps expecting something...

I started to worry.

Should I talk to her? Is this the time to confirm the relationship we have with each other?

That was what I started thinking.

Suddenly, Yuzu-san scooped her butt over and brought her body close to mine.



We were pretty close to each other to begin with, so why are you getting right up next to me? I thought nervously. *Is she... trying to tell me something?*

My head started to spin. I couldn't help but be filled with thoughts like I had to say something, I had to do something... I opened my mouth and...

...stopped.

Why? Because a little distance away, emerging from the crowd, I caught sight of Kuroha. She looked worried, almost like she was praying for something, as she was looking in our direction. Our eyes met directly. She was startled, looked to the side, and quickly left the spot she was in.

I couldn't say anything.

"Gin-san, what's the matter?" asked Yuzu-san, after a moment. She noticed I was looking off into the distance, and tilted her head cutely.

"No... It's nothing."

Kuroha, don't tell me you planned this all from the start? That's not fair... Now I'm all worried.

Kuroha might have left my field of vision, but her dainty hands were still clutching my heart.

"Kuroha, there you are. Ending up in a place like this again... I searched all over for you."

Kuroha was in a narrow little gap between two yachts that were moored on the beachfront. She was crouching on the ground and glanced in my direction, and for a brief moment it looked like she was not feeling well, but her expression immediately returned to her usual one.

"Yuzu-san will get worried that you just disappeared, Onii-chan. Don't you think?"

"I told her I was going to the bathroom, so I think it's fine."

While I'd been watching the fireworks with Yuzu-san, Amaneko-chan and the professor had met back up with us. We'd all decided to watch the fireworks together, but I'd been worried about Kuroha, so I'd gone to look for her. It had taken me a little while to find her, and that was when I'd had the thought to look in a place like this.

Kuroha had always had a habit of squeezing herself into tiny spaces whenever she was worried about something or feeling down.

Kuroha was squatting down on the ground holding her knees to her chest, with something in her hands.

Aren't those...? Did she buy those small sparklers at one of the little shops?

“Lighting up fireworks by yourself? Only loners do that!” I scolded.

“Just as clueless as usual, I see...”

It seemed like she had lit the sparkler just a moment ago. The tip had begun to glow white, but it hadn’t actually started to sparkle yet. I remembered that these types of sparklers were the ones you dangled, and that they would get more and more sparkly as they went.

I sat down next to Kuroha.

pop... pop...

The sparkler started to sparkle.

We sat there in silence, not striking up a conversation.

Usually when I was with Kuroha, it didn’t really matter if we didn’t have anything to talk about, but for some reason, things seemed awkward this time. I reached for something to talk about somewhat related to fireworks...

“I have this classmate. His name is Sugawara-kun, see... He tells me that he takes his 2D girlfriends to see 2D fireworks every summer. Last year he even went and made burn scars.”

“...Sugawara?” asked Kuroha in surprise. “Sugawara... You mean Rio Sugawara-san?”

“Yeah. You know him?”

Kuroha nodded in confirmation.

Why would Kuroha know Sugawara-kun? I thought, but then Kuroha suddenly interjected.

“Onii-chan, do you like it when people come to you for advice?”

“I don’t mind it when people rely on me, no.”

“Okay, then, I’d like to ask your opinion, Onii-chan.”

“Sure, but what’s the topic?”

“Love advice.”

“...What?” I sputtered, blankly.

“What’s the matter?” asked Kuroha.

“Love advice... Kuroha, do you have someone you’re in love with?”

Kuroha looked like she had just been hit with a ton of bricks. “Ah, no, no! Not for me! I’m asking about a classmate of mine!”

“Oh, I see...” I said, getting over my surprise.

Well, Kuroha is getting to that age, so it wouldn’t be so surprising for her to have a boy or two she likes... Yeah...

Kuroha started staring deep at my face, like she was searching for something.

“Wh-What?” I asked.

“Nothing.”

“So, what kind of advice does this classmate of yours need?”

“It’s about Sugawara-san, your classmate...”

Here's the gist of what Kuroha told me. Her classmate — the one with short hair who talked briskly that I'd seen before — had a crush on Sugawara-kun. But Sugawara-kun was a serious devotee to the 2D, so it was hard to get him to notice her. She'd tried to give up on him, but she just couldn't do it, it seems.

Sugawara-kun might have been fully on the 2D side, but he was surprisingly popular with 3D girls. For girls these days, guys that were obsessed with 2D girls seemed like a safer bet than ones that could be tempted by 3D girls. I would often see special editions of girls' magazines with themes like "GET THOSE 2D-OBSESSED GUYS TO LOOK AT YOU."

Back when pretty 2D girls had started to be a thing to get obsessed over in the Heisei Era, it had been something that tended to make you unpopular, but in the current time, it had changed considerably.

"She really wants to know how she could get Sugawara-san to pay more attention to her," continued Kuroha.

"Hmm, good question..."

I looked over at the sparkler that Kuroha held in her hand. It was sparkling like crazy and was about to go out.

"His feelings are burning bright right now, but one day they might burn out," I started. "So, perhaps she should... bide her time and wait for a chance? When Sugawara-kun has a falling out with his current girlfriends, that would be her time to strike."

"Th-That doesn't seem like the kind of advice you'd give, Onii-chan," responded Kuroha after a moment. "So you're saying to just wait?"

"I think that's a better idea than to try and do some awkward appeal as a 3D girl."

Kuroha responded with a "I see..." and then, in a tone that seemed almost introspective, muttered, "Feelings that are burning bright... will they really disappear?"

"Huh? Sugawara-kun's always been one to give up quickly on things, so I think they probably will."

"Give up quickly... That's something I'll never understand until the day I die..."

Ahh, Kuroha has always been the type that will never give up once she puts her mind to it...

After that, silence returned between the two of us. The sparkler gave its last gasp, and all that was left to illuminate us in the darkness was the light of the moon peeking in. A brief moment passed...

"Say, Onii-chan..."

"Yeah?"

"I have another classmate who needs advice..." Kuroha's words

weren't clear. It was like she was having trouble getting them out.

"What is it?"

"I'm going to talk about my classmate's problems now, understand?"

"Yeah."

Kuroha continued, seeming nervous.

"You see, one of my classmates, um... she has a crush on her older brother..."

"A 3D one?"

"Y-Yeah... Her real brother."

So not something literary, but real actual incest? That doesn't happen all that often, no... It's no wonder she wants to ask someone for advice.

"Sh-She has started to think about the future with her and her brother, but it's not like her parents would accept such a thing so easily in the first place..."

This was a common pattern. It was a standard plot point in Orthodox literature for the brother and sister's parents to be against their love and for them to elope.

"And it's not just her parents, but there are other hurdles... She has a friend who also loves her brother."

"So, one of those love-triangle things?" I asked.

"No, it's not anything as serious as that, yet. She's worried that if she does anything with her brother, it would steal away her friend's happiness. It seems she's really worried about what she should do."

"Hmm... I see, I see. But is she really so worried about her friend's feelings?"

"Yes, she is. I mean, if things go badly, her friend could become so depressed that she might even die."

What?! You're saying the friend would kill herself?! That friend of hers must really, really love her brother.

"So to summarize, thanks to her parents and her friend, she's unable to just come out and tell her feelings straight to her brother, is what you're saying?" I asked.

"Yes, exactly."

I see now. Even if it's not about my own personal situation, thinking about how to help someone else's love problems would definitely be part of what Odaira-sensei told me when he said to "experience love."

"Can you tell me just how much this girl likes her brother? Does she have a crush on him just a little bit, or a whole lot? Have you asked her about that?"

Kuroha thought for a second, and then replied.

"It's not that she likes him..."

"What? Then why did she come to you for advice? I thought that she had a crush on her brother, so..."

“She loves him. She truly loves him,” responded Kuroha, without leaving any doubt.

Just at that moment, a firework exploded in the sky near us. The fireworks were being shot up from various different locations, and so it seemed like they just started them from a place nearby where we were.

Our faces were lit up in the white light shining overhead. For a few seconds, we stared at each other wordlessly.

“Love... It’s not something to be taken lightly, no...” I said.

Kuroha put up a brave face, but it quickly flushed red.

“U-Um, I said it was love, but it’s a complicated love. There’s some of it that’s attraction to the opposite sex, but there’s also her love of family, and her love as a sibling, and maybe even like just love for humanity as a whole mixed in there...” Kuroha explained while waving her hands up and down. “I-I think she’s exaggerating when she says she loves him that much, but she really thinks so herself. How emotional can you get, right? Maybe she’s just like making a big deal out of it?”

“I don’t think she’s emotional or making a big deal out of it at all,” I said.

“Y-You think?”

“Yeah. If she really feels that strongly, I bet she’s thinking about her brother all the time, isn’t she? It must be tough for her.”

“...It’s almost around the clock lately...” started Kuroha, lowering her eyebrows and speaking in a hushed tone. “When she’s in class, or when she’s taking a bath, or when she’s talking to other people... it seems like she can’t get him out of her head, no matter what...”

“Wow, she must be really love-sick. I’d be worried that her backed up feelings would end up causing her mental problems.”

“Y-Yes, exactly!” yelled Kuroha, leaning in suddenly.

A little surprised, I averted my gaze.

“S-Sorry. Anyway, that’s the situation. Onii-chan, what would be your advice?”

“Yes, right. Well, if this were something from Orthodox literature —”

“I want to hear what you think yourself, Onii-chan, not about what happens in books. And no stupid jokes, either.”

“Okay.” After being scolded so swiftly, I paused for a moment. “Well, in that case the answer is clear. She should ignore the hurdles around her, and tell her brother exactly how she feels. It’s considerate to think about the people around her, but... but to keep her feelings bottled up inside because of that... I think she’d regret it for the rest of her life.”

“...her life...” Kuroha seemed stuck on my words, repeating them

seriously.

You sure are being serious about this, despite it being about one of your friends.

“...Yeah, you’re right,” Kuroha said, nodding to herself.

I was actually quite moved. “Now that I think about it, I can’t believe that you have such a close friend to confide in you about this kind of worry. As your brother, I’m overjoyed. You guys must be true friends, no?”

“Huh? True friends?”

“Yeah. So who is it? The short-haired one seems to have a crush on Sugawara-kun, so it’s not her... Is it the one who wears glasses?”

She was the one who’d come over one weekend to hang out with Kuroha.

“N-No, not her...”

“Would you mind if you told me exactly who she is? If I knew which girl it was, I could probably give her better advice. Who is it?”

“U-Um... Well... You see...” Kuroha stalled. She seemed quite uncomfortable.

...She’s acting suspicious. Don’t tell me...

“Kuroha, did you lie about this friend because you’re embarrassed about not having many?”

“I never said it was like, my best friend or anything. You’re the one who said that! And I really do have two friends in class now, I do!”

“Two... So the bright girl and the glasses one. But then, the person we’re talking about isn’t one of those two, right? So who is it?”

“...!” Kuroha made a face that screamed, “Oops!”

“Kuroha, is this really about a classmate?” I asked.

Kuroha refused to look me in the face, like she was trying to run away.

“L-Let’s go back to everyone else,” she burst out.

“Come on, Kuroha,” I prodded.

“I’ll go ahead, then,” she said, as she quickly went to stand up.

Just when I was about to tell her to hold up, she stepped into the sand. Her balance lost, she started to fall backwards...

Watch out!

I reached out to her, and in the nick of time, I caught her back as she fell. But her momentum was too much, and I fell forward.

Sand flew up in all directions. For a moment, my vision went black, and when I opened my eyes, I saw Kuroha in front of me.

Kuroha was laid out on her back, facing up, and I was on top of her. We were so close that our noses could have touched, and her perfect face was right there. She took a breath, and looked up at me.

And then...

whizwhizwhizwhiz... bang!

A firework exploded above us. Kuroha's face was lit up in the darkness. Her slender eyes were wide open, and her dainty lips were quivering ever so slightly...



——!

Perhaps it was the flash of the firework, but a certain vision came back vividly into my mind. I couldn't tell if it was reality, or a dream... That night scene...

That's it. I understand now...

It's so simple... Why was I never able to realize it before?

If it's not a story about her classmate, then...

If it's a story about someone, then...

The only person it could be is...

"I love you, Onii-chan."

I looked down upon Kuroha, speechless.

"Kuroha, is it..." I started.

"N-No, it's..." Kuroha cut me off, almost like she knew what I was going to say.

"...Huh?"

"Th-There's no way that's true, right?! Sheesh. It's another classmate of mine that asked for advice."

I stared in silence.

"Don't be an idiot! You've read too many damn books!" yelled Kuroha, trying to squirm out from under me. She stood up and started patting off the sand on her clothes. She was smiling, but it seemed somehow stiff. "C-Come on, Onii-chan."

She said I was mistaken, but should I believe her? Maybe it really is a classmate of hers, but does Kuroha actually have another friend that close to her?

I stood up, as well, and looked back over at Kuroha...

"Hey, Kuro-chan, Imose-kun! Where are you guys?"

"Gin-san, where have you gone~?"

I could hear the voices of people searching for us. Considering how loud they were, they had to be pretty close. The tense atmosphere that had surrounded Kuroha and me burst like a balloon.

I saw everyone heading in our direction. They were waving, so they must have noticed us. I headed over toward them with Kuroha by my side. As we took our first step in the sand, Kuroha muttered something under her breath.

"Such a damn coward..."

Huh?

I looked over, and it didn't look like Kuroha had noticed. She shook her head, and added these words as if to convince herself.

"But... I have to get an answer..."

A firework exploded right then, so perhaps I had misheard what she said.

"Ahhhh! Kuroha-san dragged Nii-sama in between two yachts... Is

it mating season or something already?! How lewd-nodesu! I knew you were a wild beast-nodesu!” yelled Amaneko-chan.

Everyone else quickly approached us. We all started to walk back to the hotel together as a group.

“Gin-san, look at that. It’s the finale,” said Yuzu-san, pointing to the continuous barrage of fireworks. More and more and brighter and brighter the colorful explosions grew, like a pageant of light.

bang bang bang bang bang

Kuroha stopped walking, and looked up at the fireworks. But for me, it was her perfectly proportioned profile that drew my eye. After what had just happened before, sure... Kuroha wouldn’t say anything, or tell me anything.

Tell me, Kuroha... You’re not being a good little sister.

You’re someone so close to me, and we’re supposed to share everything with one another... How dare you toy with your brother’s feelings like this...

Kuroha did all these things that seemed to imply one thing, but wouldn’t say it straight out. All I could do was conjecture.

Those words she spoke... That attitude she had... What did she truly feel?

Thinking about all those things occupied my mind.

No, not just my mind... Maybe even my heart...

I sighed, unsatisfied with it all.

Arggh, enough of this! Enough! We all saw fireworks together, so I’ll just write about that in my diary!

Odaira-sensei, it seems like it will take a while longer for me to understand love...

* * * ☐☐※■◎☐ 2 3 ★☆▼▼☐☐ * * *

I KNew it. There is SOmething strange about that Kuroha Imose. Why won’t she make Gin Imose AWare of her true FEelings? SHe seems like she really cares strongly for Gin Imose, so?

I just do not UNderstand.

It seems like it WAS 8 years and 3 months ago when she REalized her feelings for Gin Imose... Considering the TIme period, it would be near “The Great Father” Gin Imose’s formative period, YES? He would GO on to MAke many more stories in his LATER years, but they all had TURning points around this TIme.

I am JUst a little CUrious.

Ah, there I GO again. SUch a bad habit of mine.

I’ll — I’ll just TAKE a little look...

☆☐ ♀ ∞ ◆▼▼

Chapter 7: Punishment

Kuroha was quietly peeking into Gin's room. Gin was balled up in the corner, hugging his knees to his chest. Both of them were still little children: Gin a third-grader and Kuroha in second grade.

"Onii-chan..." whispered Kuroha, remembering the words she had heard a few days ago...

"If only you'd known you were going to have Kuroha, then you would have never gone and adopted Gin." Those words their uncle had said so nonchalantly while he thought they were asleep had completely upended their world. Ever since then, Gin had been acting strangely.

It wasn't like he'd stayed home from school, and in front of his friends he acted the way he usually did, but the second he was left on his own, he started to mope. Kuroha couldn't help but be worried about him. Every night, she'd gone peeking into his room, looking at him being so gloomy and becoming depressed herself. The cycle repeated itself again and again.

What should I do? I can't stand seeing Onii-chan that way... thought Kuroha, clutching her chest tight. But she couldn't manage to say that directly to Gin, or to the people around him.

Kuroha had loved Gin ever since she was little. Of course, it hadn't been a romantic sort of love, but love for her family, for her brother. Until she had started elementary school, Kuroha hadn't had an easy time dealing with the people around her, and even now, whenever she fought with her parents or friends, she would retreat into the underground library, sulking, holing herself up in her own little domain.

It was always Gin that would reach out a hand to her at those times. Kuroha would put up a strong front, but inside her heart, she would be ever so happy. So happy she could barely stand it. There'd been a number of times she'd locked herself in the underground library even when she wasn't all that depressed. All so that Gin would gently come to get her.

"Kuroha, come on out already. If you don't come out, I'm going to pee right here, you know," Gin would say from the other side of the door to the underground library.

Kuroha couldn't help but respond to his idiotic ways of trying to cheer her up... It made her so happy, she didn't know how to describe it.

If Gin hadn't been there, Kuroha would have come to despise the world, and she might have locked herself in that library underground for good. Kuroha felt that the reason she was able to barely tolerate the society of the world was all thanks to Gin. And that Gin, who she loved so dearly, was now huddled up in a ball clutching his knees to his chest, barely holding himself together.

I have to do something! I want to do something, but... I don't know what I should do.

Kuroha was always logical and good at communicating, but she couldn't think of what to say to Gin. Her lessons at school hadn't taught her what to do when a brother and sister found out that they weren't blood-related, and it wasn't written about in the old books she read, either. She wondered where she could study the important things in life...

Just then, Gin looked over toward her.

"Kuroha, is that you?"

He noticed I was peeking in on him! realized a flustered Kuroha, not able to answer him.

Gin waited a moment for her to say something, then continued.

"You heard what our uncle said too, right, Kuroha?"

Kuroha remained silent, but mustered up her courage and slowly shuffled into Gin's room.

"Onii-chan... Um... Don't worry about it."

Gin didn't say anything in return. He just glanced back at Kuroha. In that instant, Kuroha was startled. Those eyes of his held such sadness and loneliness, and absolutely none of his usual idiotic self... It touched her heart. And at the same time, a strange feeling began welling up inside of her.

I... want to squeeze him tight.

Is this a motherly instinct? No, it's similar but different, I think. It's more painful, somehow... Like my chest feels tight. What could this feeling be?

But it wasn't the time to be asking herself such questions. She had to cheer Gin up somehow, and she decided on a course of action. Kuroha sat down next to him and started to read the modern literature book she was holding.

Gin looked over at her suspiciously, but she didn't pay him any heed and kept on reading.

That's because I'm the same person I always was.

And you're the same Onii-chan you were before, too. Even though we aren't blood-related, nothing has changed.

This was the message that Kuroha was trying to tell him. She wished for her feelings to reach him. She wished he would cheer up.

Gin continued to watch her read, not saying a thing. And a few

days later, the brooding Gin surprisingly, and suddenly, made a complete recovery.

“Kuroha! *Gimai* are great, aren’t they?” yelled Gin all of a sudden just as Kuroha returned home from school. He had run all the way to the entrance. He sported a bright smile that had been missing from his face for a little while. “Yeah, it’s gotta be *gimai*, no doubt about it!”

Gimai



“H-Huh?” Kuroha had no clue what had brought about this out-of-the-blue proclamation. But ignoring the confused Kuroha, Gin went on to talk all about how amazing non-blood related sisters could be. Like what part of their relationship was cool, and how *gimai* encompassed both the “girlfriend” attribute and the “little sister” attribute in combination, etc. etc.

At first Kuroha was taken aback, but she slowly regained her composure. It was then that it dawned on her.

Gimai... *Wait, is he talking about me?*

Kuroha’s little sister Miru had been born already, but she hadn’t yet turned two. Gin was clearly talking about a non-blood-related little sister who was a little more grown up.

As Kuroha started to contemplate exactly what the implications were in this line of thought, Gin spouted out something incredible.

“I think I want to marry a *gimai*!”

“E-Eh-Ehhhhhhh?!” Kuroha couldn’t believe it. *D-Did he just propose?!*

After having something like that be said to her, there was no way that Kuroha could have stayed calm. All the blood drained from her head, and her mouth began flapping open and closed like a fish out of water.

Marriage...

If she were to admit her true feelings to herself, she would have to admit that when she’d heard that she and Gin weren’t blood-related, the thought had passed through her mind. That since they weren’t related, she would be able to marry him. She had shaken it off as a foolish idea the second she’d thought it, though.

“Kuroha...” said Gin, grabbing both her hands. Kuroha had already completely lost it and couldn’t even look him in the eyes. “Literature... I love it so much! I’ve made my decision... I’m gonna be an author!”

“...Huh?” Kuroha took a moment to understand what exactly Gin was saying.

“I’m talking about *I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby*! Homyura Taitei is the best!” Gin clarified. Kuroha was speechless as he continued. “This is all thanks to you, Kuroha. Thank you so much!”

And that seemed to be what had happened. Gin had looked at Kuroha as she had stayed by his side reading while he was depressed, and he’d gotten it into his head to try reading himself. The book he’d decided to read had been the super-famous book of Orthodox literature, *I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby*, or *Oniaka* for short. The book had moved him to his core. The main character had almost the same circumstances as himself, which must have made it really easy

for him to relate to. In other words, he had been healed by a story about love between siblings.

“My favorite parts had to be the last scene and where Homyura gave the main character a ‘kiss of trust.’ Anyway Homyura is just too cute! Homyura might be way older than me, but I still feel like she’s the little sister I could only dream of!”

Kuroha was still speechless.

Gin was head over heels for Homyura. He started complimenting her on everything, from her looks to her personality, holding her above all else. And that wasn’t all.

What concerned Kuroha the most was that Gin had this look in his eyes different than any she’d seen before. His eyes sparkled with passion. She had never seen Gin with eyes like those before. Kuroha could tell in her gut... She could feel it.

Gin was in love with Homyura.

“And there you have it. Now then, Kuroha, read *Oniaka* right now!”

“...I’m never, ever, reading it.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“...Not telling.”

Onii-chan, you dummy! is what Kuroha wanted to yell out. She wanted to punch him, but she restrained herself. She wasn’t some little kid, damn it. Kuroha angrily stormed up to the second story where her room was, marching up the stairs with thunderous noise. Gin called after her, but she ignored him.

Homyura was the best at everything, according to Gin. And she was also the best at pissing off Kuroha.

Something is wrong with you, Onii-chan! She’s just some girl from a book! And you have a real gimai right next to you...

That was when Kuroha finally realized. When Gin had said, “I think I want to marry a *gimai*,” maybe he had meant he wanted to marry Kuroha, in a roundabout sort of way?

Kuroha went in her room and laid out on her bed. Visions danced in her head...

Gin looking sad.

Gin laughing as he said he wanted to marry a *gimai*.

Gin looking sad, Gin saying he wanted to marry a *gimai*, Gin looking sad, Gin saying he wanted to marry a *gimai*... Gin’s expression kept changing back and forth.

Hey, Onii-chan... Isn’t what you really wanted to say, “I’m lonely, so please marry me, Kuroha?”

...

I don’t know... I don’t know how you really feel, Onii-chan! Kuroha wanted to cry out.

Thinking she would read something and get into a better mood, she reached out to the magazine rack next to her bed without sitting up, pulling out whichever magazine she happened to grab. It was an issue of *MONTHLY GIRL*.

It was a magazine she had bought so that she would have something to talk about with the other girls in class. It was aimed at elementary school girls and covered things like fashion and anime, anything that was in vogue. She'd flipped through it after she'd bought it, but it was all so dumb that she'd left it on the shelf. She'd thought that she'd rather read modern literature than drivel like that.

But... there was one article that grabbed her attention.

“LOVEMATCH☆FORTUNE”

Let's check your compatibility with that boy you love!

“That boy I love...” Kuroha murmured.

Of course, this was referring to a partner who a person was in love with romantically. Kuroha didn't have anyone like that. She had never had a “first love,” and besides, she wasn't interested in stuff like romance to begin with. Or so it should have been.

For a moment, Kuroha imagined Gin's boringly average face flashing his pearly whites. Shocked with herself, her face flushed red, and she shook her head back and forth.

N-No way! There's just no way that could be!

Just as a test. An experiment, if you will. Yes, I'll tell the fortune of my compatibility with Onii-chan. What would be the harm in that? It's definitely not because of my being worried about what he meant when he talked about marriage, no way. It's merely to get some use out of this magazine I spent good money on.

Kuroha continued to make excuses to no one in particular as she tried checking her compatibility with Gin.

The result: “So-so.”

“So-so, my butt! We're totally compatible, damn it! You stupid magazine!” Kuroha pouted and threw the magazine away. It made a nice arc as it flew over into the corner of the room.

Kuroha decided to completely forget what Gin had said earlier and what she'd just done. All that mattered was that Gin was feeling better now. She could see him smiling again. He didn't look the least bit cool to her, but at least when he was smiling, she thought he looked cute. *Yeah, he's the cute-type, not the cool-type*, thought Kuroha, chuckling to herself.

He'll be fine now. Thank goodness. That was what she had thought, but...

After that, Gin started to write novels. Whenever he was home, he would be sitting down staring at his computer. Whenever Gin got obsessed with something, he would focus on it like a laser, so the time

Kuroha got to talk with him decreased considerably.

Kuroha wanted to stay next to him, but she was too stubborn to show it. However, she was still concerned about him, so when he got wrapped up in writing, she would go to check on him.

One night, she went in to do just that, to check on Gin and see how he was doing.

Gin was... passed out on his desk, fast asleep. Rows of text were displayed on the computer screen in front of him that must have been the novel he was writing. It seemed like he had fallen asleep while in the process of writing.

Kuroha walked up behind Gin, trying hard not to make any noise. The first line of the novel was...

“£ → ☆ = HEAVE-HO ☆ = →◎ SPACE ■☆■”

“...Wh-What the heck?” Kuroha felt like she had been sucker punched. She had no clue what it meant. *Could this really be Gin’s novel?*

Kuroha was flabbergasted. When Gin had said he wanted to become an author, Kuroha had decided to help cheer him on. Kuroha had admired his striving for a goal that was so hard to obtain, because it was something her realist self wouldn’t easily have been able to allow herself to do.

But the first thing she thought after glancing at his work was...

No way. This is not happening. Even speaking quite generously, this would be like trying to scale a sheer cliff with only your legs.

In other words, the chances of Gin becoming an author were basically zero.

Exhaling a deep sigh, Kuroha continued to read the screen, when she paused at a single sentence.

In that instant, her heart leaped. Most of Gin’s writing was unintelligible, but for some reason, she could understand this part.

“●■ = = ①”

In other words, “I am alone.”

I’m sure that’s what it means. Does this novel contain how Gin truly feels? Not knowing what to do, Kuroha looked down at Gin’s face. She could faintly see the marks of tears around his eyes.

Ah... Onii-chan, it does still bother you. You seemed like you were totally okay after you said you wanted to become an author, but you weren’t actually healed, were you? It hasn’t really been that long since that day, so maybe there isn’t anything to be done about it, but... you couldn’t even show me these feelings? Please, don’t hide them from me...

“Onii-chan...” cried Kuroha, heartbreakingly.

And then, coincidentally perhaps, Gin muttered something in his sleep.

“...Homyurah...”

Kuroha's expression immediately changed to annoyance.

"Homyura... Honk-honk..."

Kuroha felt her muscles tighten up, and began to grind her teeth. Every time Gin said Homyura's name, Kuroha got annoyed. She couldn't let it go.

"Homyura... Kiss of trust..."

"Wh-What the hell is a 'kiss of trust'?!" yelled Kuroha. There were plenty of boys in the current day who preferred to fall in love with 2D girls, but the young Kuroha couldn't accept that it was possible to seriously fall in love with them.

She was angry at herself for worrying about Gin so much like this, and she knew she was being foolish. But she really couldn't stand how Gin would blab on about Homyura this and Homyura that. It lit this fire within her.

What is this flame that keeps getting lit up in me?

Kuroha being as wise as she was, she could recognize her own feelings. She could even, if only faintly, discern the type of emotion that had taken root within her. But it was something that should not have been between that of an older brother and younger sister, so she forced herself to believe that it had to be impossible, that it had to be some kind of mistake.

But Gin, knowing nothing of Kuroha's internal conflict, continued to mutter in his sleep.

"Homyura..."

Ooh, that pisses me off! Kuroha, her heart and mind in shambles, lost all reason. *That's it! I've decided to punish you, Onii-chan!*

Heh, that's right! I'm gonna steal it! Oh, poor you... While you were asleep, I'm gonna do something horrible to you. But it's your fault because you deserve it, Onii-chan! This is all because you're so obsessed with that 2D little sister!

Onii-chan, you dummy! You big fat dummy!

Kuroha continued mentally berating him, almost like she was psyching herself up for this "punishment" she was planning for him. Kuroha might have been sharp, but even she didn't realize it herself.

"...dummy..."

She was done psyching herself up. It was time for the "punishment."

Kuroha moved closer to Gin, who was sleeping with his cheek against the desk. Closer and closer their faces came to each other...

And quietly, their lips met.

...

They're... very soft...

.....

Kuroha, now calm, glanced around her like a nervous thief, and

hurriedly made her exit from Gin's room. Her face bright red, she returned to her room.

Then, that issue of *MONTHLY GIRL* caught her eye. On the cover was written something about compatibility with your love, or something. She picked up the magazine and started flipping through it.

Her compatibility with Gin had been "so-so." She knew that already. What she wanted to read was...

"For those of you whose results were 'so-so': Don't give up just because of that result. If you follow our advice, he'll definitely end up..."

Kuroha ended up reading the entire magazine cover to cover.

★

One day in the 23rd Century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san... *The Guy Odaira Hour* is on!" exclaimed Gin.

Transcript of *The Gai Odaira Hour* broadcast August 15th, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author), Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/Illustrator)

"Letters from the Listeners Segment"

◆ "Why Couldn't They Realize, Despite Coming So Close?"

The other day, I went to a museum where they had ancient games on display. They were games from the Heisei Era. Two of them, in fact.

The first was an action game where you were a secret agent with a special mission where you had to sneak around everywhere called *Metal Ge** Solid*.

The other one was a romance simulation game that took place in a high school, where you used a handheld gaming device to take photos of girls called *Photo Ka***.

I find it mystifying that, despite them creating those two games, the creators of that time had been unable to "fully awaken."

Odaira-sensei, what do you think?

KANAGAWA Prefecture, GAMEMAN (109 Years Old)

Haruka: "Fully awaken"? Whatever could he mean?"

Odaira: "One should not underestimate this listener. In fact, I have had the exact same thought. It is indeed unfortunate that despite those two works being created, no one of the time had 'fully awakened.'"

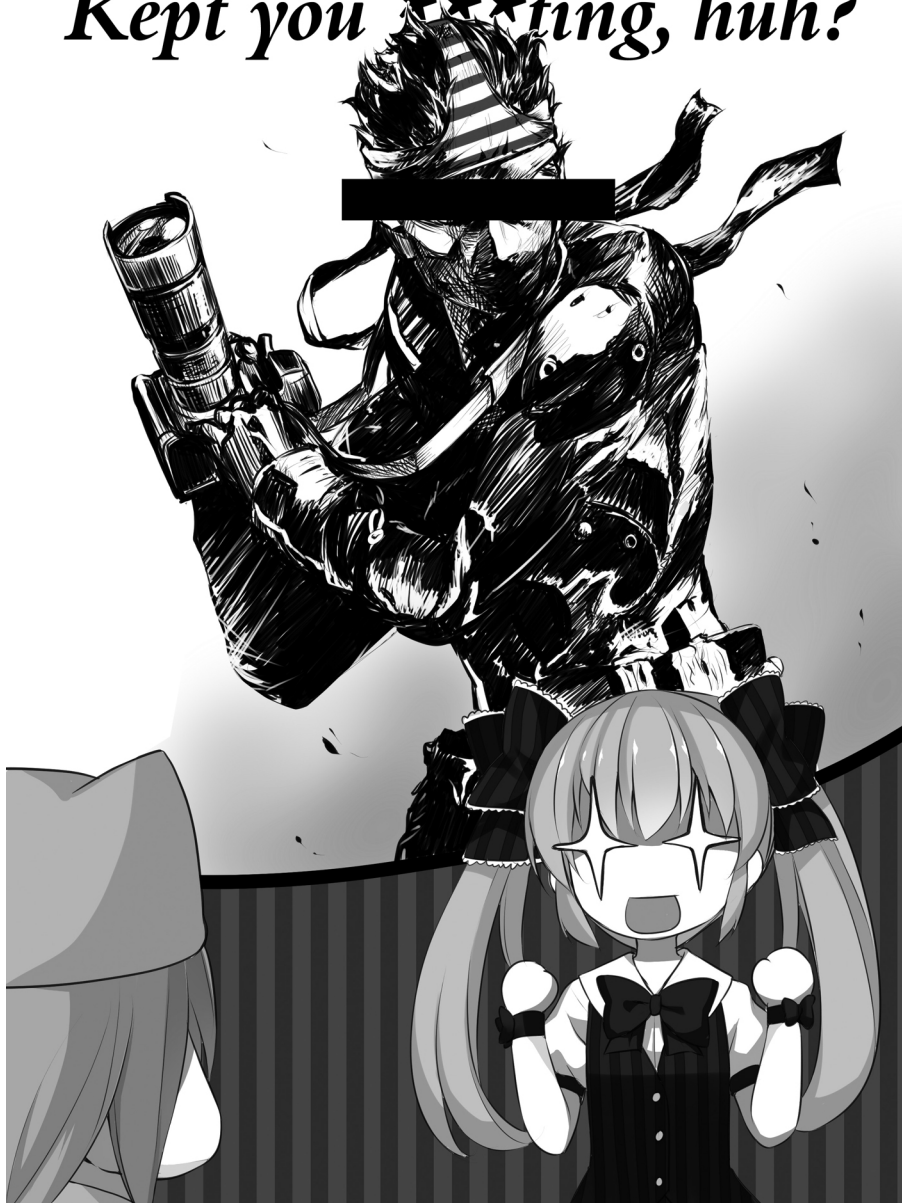
Haruka: "But you still haven't explained what 'fully awakened' means yet! Don't dodge the question!"

Odaira: "Infiltrate' and 'Photograph.' With those two words to guide

you, there is only one thing ‘fully awaken’ could mean! A stealth photo mission into an elementary school! Yes, that’s it! I’ll fund it, so let’s make this game a reality! Hiding in a cardboard box, you will infiltrate YEAR 4 MARU class, and take pictures of Miru-chan’s still-warm gym clothes! A-And then... One day, the gym clothes will be a little stained with some ammonia! Ah! And...”

Miru: “...(leaves without saying anything)”

*Kept you ***ting, huh?*



Chapter 8: Double Standard

* * * ☐☐※■●☐ 2 3 ★☆▼▼☐☐ * * *

HUH? My brother is coming to this time period? That idiot, WHAT is he planning to do? Wasn't observing "The Great Father" my responsibility?

AND after I had finally successfully adjusted their memories... I hope he doesn't do anything weird.

I suppose I MUST be a little on guard, yes. SHEESH, he's been such a pain ever since we were born in the SHIZUOKA Denierian factory. I SUPose a little sister having to deal with HER pain-in-the-butt older brother is the same no matter the era...

☆☐♂ ♀ ∞ ◆▼▼

In the middle of the night I was laying down in the hotel room, not able to sleep. Even though I was pretty tired out from playing on the beach all day, I couldn't keep my eyes closed. Checking the clock on the wall, it was already 1 AM.

Well, I might as well do what I always do when I can't go to sleep. I started to count the number of pleats in a pleated skirt I imagined in my mind.

"One pleat, two pleats..." The problem with this was that I would quickly run out of pleats.

Just as I was about to fret, there was a sudden knock on my door.

"Nii-sama!"

"...Oh, it's you, Amaneko-chan." She entered the room wearing a black, one-piece pajama outfit. Her shoulders were bare and uncovered, and you could see quite a ways down the front of her chest area... *Th-That's quite the adult outfit...*

"Ehehe, I've come-nodesu. I hope I'm not bothering you. If I am, I'll go right back to my room, okay?" said Amaneko-chan, her eyebrows arched like she was pleading me.

Well, I'm bored since I can't get to sleep anyway... Can't hurt to talk for a bit, right? We could make small talk about things like her school in the Special Cultural District or my school life.

Just as long as I don't talk about things like creating new words, her attitude won't suddenly shift into high gear. Talking just a little should be fine, right? I thought, as Amaneko-chan walked over to the window and opened the curtains.

“The stars are so beautiful tonight. I remember that the stars were beautiful that night as well-nodesu.”

“That night?” I asked.

“Yes. That night when I met the ‘messenger of God’ in the backyard of my house-nodesu.”

Oh... Not this story again...

“Amaneko-chan,” I started. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but meeting a ‘messenger of God’ is a little hard to believe...”

“So you don’t believe me after all, Nii-sama...” Amaneko-chan’s eyebrows immediately sank.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized, and Amaneko-chan gave me a look of pure sadness.

“It was God’s messenger who led me to find out about your existence, Nii-sama. In other words, our meeting was ordained by God-nodesu.”

I could only listen.

“Our meeting was ordained by God, so there must be more significance to it than just a brother and sister meeting for the first time-nodesu,” said Amaneko-chan, her eyes beginning to fill again with vigor. “I just know... I just know that it’s something important for the very world...” She looked me straight in the eyes and asked, “Nii-sama, are you interested in mythological stories?”

“Myths? Not really, no... Are you, Amaneko-chan?”

“Yes, I am! I hate old traditions and things, but I can get really passionate when it comes to myths and legends-nodesu. There are creation myths everywhere about a ‘brother and sister who created the world’ you know-nodesu. Why is that, do you think? I don’t believe that it is merely coincidence-nodesu.”

Amaneko-chan continued on about all the world creation myths featuring brother-sister relationships. Of course one of the most famous is from Japan—

“Like 8□ — Izanagi and 8▷ — Izanami, for instance?” I suggested.

“Yes, exactly. Just like the faces you just wrote: Izanagi and Izanami-nodesu. This is what I believe... I believe that my meeting with you, Nii-sama, is to begin the creation of a new world-nodesu! Let us create new words... Yes, let us create a new world! Brother and sister, following the will of God!”

“B-But I’m trying to tell you, this messenger of God doesn’t exist...”

As I responded hesitantly, Amaneko-chan puffed up her cheeks.

“Fine, and if I really did meet one then what will you do?”

“Hmm... I guess... I’d have to apologize?”

“Alrighty! And I’ll take you up on that apology in the form of

being your first-nodesu!”

“Huh?” I didn’t follow.

“And if there wasn’t actually a messenger of God, then I’ll apologize to you intsead... by giving you mine...” Amaneko-chan fluttered her dewy eyes, and started to pull on the string tying her one-piece over her shoulder...

Ugh... I was trying to stay away from this topic but Amaneko-chan isn’t gonna let me, is she?

It was a little strange, but being come on to so strongly actually made me a lot less in the mood. She was my blood-related little sister, so perhaps there was also some subconscious safety mechanism going on suppressing my urges.

Amaneko-chan took off her one-piece, and her naked, nubile body was...

...not on display, because before that could happen, a voice rang out.

“Oh for goodness sake, what the hell do you think you’re doing?!”

Kuroha was standing in the doorway, her arms crossed, glaring at the two of us equally. She was wearing the night clothes the hotel provided which were similar to a yukata.

“I thought something was suspicious when I saw you wash... all kinds of places... in the bath earlier. I figured you were plotting something like this, you nympho!”

It seemed like the girls all went to the private onsen that was attached to their room. In Orthodox literature, this would have been one of the places for an insert illustration, but since this was reality, unfortunately I didn’t get to see such a steamy situation.

“K-Kuroha-san, how did you unlock the door?! Do you have skill picking locks or something-nodesu?!”

“I happen to have a very good friend who is known as the ‘brains’ of Japan.”

“The brains of Japan? Ah! You must mean Professor Choumabayashi-nodesu!”

Aha, I see! Kuroha must have borrowed some door unlocking invention from the professor.

“Grr... How dare you get in my way, *gimai* has-been. The supporting character should just sit back and stay outta this-nodesu!”

“Hmph. You sound like some third-rate villain. I think it’s pretty obvious who’s a supporting character!”

Oh jeez, they’ve started...

Seriously, what’s with those two? They’re like oil and water... Even if they weren’t fighting over me, I bet their personalities would still clash.

Just when I was about to get in between them and try to calm the situation, Amaneko-chan yelled out.

“Nii-sama and I are the children of God-nodesu!”

“Whaat?” Kuroha was incredulous. “Run out of things to say, so now you’re starting to spout out your delusions, are we?”

“It’s not a delusion-nodesu. The messenger of God in the shape of a black cloth exists-nodesu!”

“Onii-chan, she’s started to talk about that again...” said Kuroha, her face suddenly full of pity.

“Amaneko-chan, I’m sorry,” I began. “I can’t believe a creature like that actually exists.”

Amaneko-chan’s eyes slowly started filling up with tears.

“*hic* Th-They do exist! I met him-nodesu!”

“If they do, then they should hurry up and show themselves already,” scoffed Kuroha.

“They doos! I saws them, I heards dem! I remembers it like it was yestadays-nodesu! The memory is clear!! If... If that was just a dream or an illusion..... I-Ish must be going insane-nodesu! B-But, I can’t believe that-nodesu!”

Amaneko-chan was really in a pitiful state.

Aw, man... She’s really got it bad, hasn’t she?

—And that’s when it happened.

《☆■○▼▼》

Huh? What?

《...☆※...Amaneko Makoto’s condition.....■◎.....this is MOST definitely BAD》

A low, male voice rang out. Amaneko-chan reacted with a start.

“Th-That voice...”

《I guess I will have to remodify your memories AFTER all.》

From the center of the room, a light began to shine.

《How do you DO?》

There was something in the center of the light. It was... a talking... black cloth.

Th-This is exactly like the messenger of God that Amaneko-chan was talking about!

“N-No way...” Kuroha’s face was frozen stiff with a combination of shock and fear.

“W-We meet again-nodesu!” exclaimed Amaneko-chan, her face lighting up in joy.

Hmm, I guess I should also introduce myself. But before I had the chance, he continued introducing himself.

《Pardon the tardy introduction. I am Prime Minister RBUR, and I have come from the year 3702.》

“Huh? Prime Minister?”

《Yes. RBUR of the Pantyhose Party, at YOUR service. My right leg is RB, and my left leg is UR.》

“RBUR... Rub Your Pantyhose-san?” It was undeniable that he looked the part of a pair of pantyhose.

《I am RBUR.》

“Is there a Tear Your Pantyhose-san, too?”

《Gyaaaaaaaaaah! You mustn't say the word 'tear'!》

RBUR Pantyhose-san shrieked, curled himself into a ball and was shaking like a leaf.

Why do I have this strange sense of dejavu?

《Wheeze... I-In our culture that word is TABOO... P-Please b-be MORE careful. I felt like my whole body was about to get a RUN...》

“O-Oh...”

“Hey, Onii-chan... Didn't the professor say something about the Prime Minister being a pair of pantyhose in the 38th century?”

《I see you are well-informed. As a Japanese PERson I of course love my country of Japan, and thus gladly serve as Prime Minister.》

“A Japanese person...?” muttered Kuroha. “And the Pantyhose Party? Just hearing the name makes me feel weak.”

“How do you do, RBUR Pantyhose-san? And what might we have the pleasure?” I asked politely. RBUR Pantyhose-san responded that he had something he wanted to talk with us about.

Something he wants to talk about? I'm not sure what topic exactly would concern both us and a pair of pantyhose, but sure...

《My little sister has been OBserving you, but as I have a certain objective in mind I MYself have come personally.》

“From the 38th century, right? What did you use to get here, some old railway tracks?”

《...》 He didn't seem to get my joke. 《Among us Pantyhose Party members, we black pantyhose are SKilled at time-travel. The beige pantyhose SUck at it. And yet they have the Nerve to think that *they* are the mainstream of the Pantyhose Party. It makes me ANgry! As the saying goes, “The Pantyhose Party may die, but we black pantyhose will never perish!”》

“Onii-chan, my head is starting to hurt trying to keep up with this...”

“Hehe,” chuckled Amaneko-chan. “The *gimai* may die but the *jitsumai* will never perish-nodesu.”

《Well, I am glad you are enjoying this CHat, and since we have this chance, I guess you seeing THis might be okay,》 said RBUR Pantyhose-san, twirling around once. Right at that moment, a vision of something I'd never seen before suddenly popped into the back of my mind.

Pantyhose, knee-socks, leggings... All dancing in the sky. Symbols floating in the air.

※□→◀■●▶□▶□

The ground was pure white, all the way to the horizon.

“Wh-What is this?” I could only stammer.

《It is our World.》

In other words, this is Earth in the 38th century?!

《There are letters there you probably have not SEen before. That is the language, ○ (Earsh)》

“Ear-sh?”

《A LAnguage which was born thanks to your influence.》

“My... influence?”

《Yes. Let ME explain...》 began RBUR Pantyhose-san, who went on to tell me something completely out of left-field.

It seemed like after my death I would be known as “The Great Father” and became so famous it frankly scared me. He said that my works would have a great influence on the future. When I asked him if it was like how Kurona Gura’s “Oniaka” had influenced Japanese culture, he said it was beyond even that.

Thanks to the influence of my novels, Japanese would start using only symbols and numbers. It then spread across the entire world and was called “○(Earsh),” becoming the Earth’s universal language.

Also, future scientists who adored my works invented intelligent fabric lifeforms, or Denierians for short. The Denierians called pantyhose and knee-socks in time started to occupy crucial positions in society, and in the 38th century rather than humans, it is them that hold leadership positions on Earth.

For your information, the three main groups of Denierians were the Pantyhose Party, the Knee-Socks Party, and the Leggings Party. Among them the Pantyhose Party stood on top, due to them having the greatest affinity for living together with humans. The Knee-socks Party and Leggings Party both strongly wished to rule over the humans, and it seemed like in the past there had been rebellions...

Kuroha and I were speechless. It was just so incredible, my brain couldn’t keep up. But Amaneko-chan was almost bubbling over with joy.

“Did you hear that, Kuroha-san?! My dream, it comes true-nodesu! Everything I said was exactly right-nodesu! Who’s the crazy person now-nodesu? Nii-sama’s prose will become the universal language of the world-nodesu!”

“I guess it’s good that the world got a universal language,” started Kuroha with a slightly strained look on her face. “But doesn’t that mean that there is a lot less variety of vocabulary?”

《You say that like an ACCusation.》 He went on to explain that after the world got a universal language, the number of conflicts dropped precipitously. Everyone spoke the same language, and used the same letters. It seemed like ○(Earsh) melted differences in race,

citizenship, and nationality. By the way, it seemed like the ○ in ○(Earsh) is meant to represent all peoples of the Earth linking together into a ring, and is said to be a reflection of my own will.

“Kuroha, it seems like I’m gonna think about big issues like ‘The World Becomes One’ in the future!”

“And what are you currently thinking about for your novel?” responded Kuroha.

“I’m thinking about the color of the panties the heroine of my new work will be wearing.”

“...I’m going to just say this straight out. The future researchers clearly read way, way too much into your works, or just twisted them into who knows what.”

《As EXpected from “The Great Father.” You think daily about PAnties. To we Denierians, we consider panties to be our “Original Mother.” When “The Great Father” POnders the “Original Mother,” so gives birth to new CULTure, and thus begets the LOnge line of Japanese culture which has been passed down the generations!》

“Um, I dunno what to say...” I started, bashfully. “So what was written in the sky back then?” I was referring to the ※□→◀◼◎▶◻▶◻ which was written in the sky in the vision I had just had.

《It said, “Let’s PREserve Our Environment.”》

“Oh... So you have movements like that in the 38th century? Like preserving forests or protecting plant life?” I asked nonchalantly. But RBUR Pantyhose-san responded seriously.

《The OPposite. Plant life must be EXterminated.》

“.....What?”

《In our time, plants are a BAne that causes the outbreak of bad bacteria. In order to protect the ENvironment, cleaning agent is spread across the WORld. For YOUR information, the cleaning agent was INvented first in Japan, of course.》

I responded that I thought that was pretty amazing, but Kuroha looked very suspicious.

“So... does this cleaning agent have any effect on humans?” she asked.

《...Not in the short-term, NO. However it has a slight effect on their DNA, so over many GEnerations effects will accumulate. But the effects are not NEgative, rather the humans became more adapted to the ENvironment.》

A-Adapted...?

“Onii-chan...” started Kuroha, the blood draining from her face. “Do you remember what the professor said back when we were facing off against Sadame? She said that in the 38th century, there were ‘human-shaped’ ones...”

...human-shaped ones... I had a bad feeling about this. He said that their DNA had slowly been affected, so that humans in the 38th century had a form that was *just slightly* different than ours... RBUR Pantyhose-san had called it a “cleaning agent”... *But wouldn't it be more accurate to call it “pollution”?*

《Oh Great Father, I UNDERstand what you must be thinking. I DO apologize, but that is just your perspective as an ANcient being.》

He went on to explain that the humans accepted the dispersal of the cleaning agent and adapted. In the 38th century the lifespan of humans was lengthened, and the number of humans who felt like they led happy lives was far greater than the number in the current day. Furthermore, although wild plant life had all been eliminated, the various species were all properly preserved. It was true that some ecosystems had been affected by the cleaning agent, slightly, but nothing went extinct because of them. On the contrary, all the various species became healthier and more active.

《To give you an EXample, to a person from farther in the past than the 23rd century, your WORld and its culture of 2D girls could be considered as “polluted.”》

“I can't accept that argument...” I said. “2D-moe is nothing more than culture or a part of human society. What you are talking about is a far more fundamental change...”

《The WORld has changed. Either way it is the same PHenomena.》

I couldn't help but feel like I'd been coaxed to his side, but on second thought he might have had a point.

I remembered something that had happened before.

I was arguing with the president of the Literature Club in the 21st century about her narrow views. I was sure that she would have viewed our current day society where our 2D Prime Minister Nyamochan would meet with foreign heads of state, and then at the press conference afterwards make sure to flash her panties, as something to be feared.

If I were to reject the world of the 38th century here, it would be one of those... um... what do you call them...? Yeah, a double standard.

To the rulers of the 38th century, the Pantyhose Party, spreading some kind of cleaning agent or something across the Earth and changing the humans into something... human shaped... and exterminating all plant life... It was all natural for them. To a person from the 23rd century like me, I couldn't say that it was wrong, or abnormal, or reject it.

“...Okay, I understand,” I said, despite not actually understanding anything at all. But I at least didn't want to reject what he was saying.

《HMHM. Great Father, your understanding is GReatly

appreciated.》

“So, did you appear before us to tell us this?

《...Huh? OH, what was I doing here again? Ah, that’s right! NOW I remember.》 RBUR Pantyhose-san floated over to right in front of Amaneko-chan and stopped, surprising her. 《I DO apologize for failing to manipulate your MEMories properly. I figured that I MUst take responsibility, but first I have a QQuestion for you. You ARE trying to create the future together with Gin Imose, yes?》

“Correct! Just as your guidance directed me to-nodesu!”

《Then... What IF... What if you had to CHOOSE between this “future” you wish for, and this “brother” called Gin Imose?》

“Huh?” replied Amaneko-chan, and tilted her head like she was puzzled.

《The “future,” or your “brother”? WHICH is it?》

“.....Th-That’s a difficult question-nodesu. To me, Nii-sama is the future, so I can’t separate them-nodesu. But if you ask me to choose just one...” Amaneko-chan’s face began to flush, and, looking at me with fluttery eyes, “...I choose you, Nii-shama...”

《...I SEE,》 said RBUR Pantyhose-san, and began twirling clockwise.

He spun, and spun, and spun, not saying a thing. It was almost like a black vortex...

...Why? I have this gut feeling I can’t place... It’s like the air around RBUR Pantyhose-san is changing... I’m starting to feel more and more anxious... Is RBUR Pantyhose-san trying to do something?

After spinning for a little while, RBUR Pantyhose-san suddenly stopped.

《Amaneko Makoto... I HAD thought to erase your memories. BUT I have changed my mind,》 he proclaimed to Amaneko-chan.

《Instead, I will ERase you entirely.》

—And in that instant, Amaneko-chan disappeared, without a sound, in the blink of an eye.

“——huh?” I looked at the place where Amaneko-chan had once been, but there was nothing there.

No way... I can’t believe this, or rather, I don’t want to believe this... Amaneko-chan was... erased... by RBUR Pantyhose-san?

《Amaneko Makoto was an existence BROught about from you correcting history. An ANOMaly. I thought I could USE her, so I tried, but it DID not go as planned. I have no NEED for her if she says deluded things like that.》

No need for her?! I snapped. Something inside me snapped.

“HEY!” I reached out for RBUR Pantyhose-san with my right arm almost instinctively, but he flew up out of my reach. “What the hell?! Give back Amaneko-chan!”

《Unfortunately, even I do NOT have the power.》

“Y-You’ve got to be kidding me...”

It can’t be...

It can’t be, it can’t be, it can’t be!

It... It’s only been a couple of months since I met her... And yet... Sure, she has her share of issues... But she’s my real sister, she shares my blood, and she holds me so dearly... And now she’s... Like it was nothing at all... She’s...

What the hell is this?!

My blood felt like it was about to flow backwards with rage, as RBUR Pantyhose-san responded in the opposite manner, calmly.

《Oh Great Father, I HAVE something I just must ask of you.》

Shut up! I don’t want to hear it!

《——“Literature” or “little sister.” If I told you to choose between them, which would you pick? 》

...huh?!

《Feel free to replace “little sister” with “love” or “your loved ones,” if you WISH.》

It was a question quite like the one he had posed to Amaneko-chan.

“Onii-chan,” said Kuroha, her eyes begging me.

Ah... She wants me to answer “literature,” doesn’t she? If I answered “little sister” she’ll probably get erased just like Amaneko-chan did!

I answered. Without any hesitation.

“You know damn well what I’d choose!”

《YES. You are the “Great Father,” after ALL...》

“My answer is——”

《...Anija, what are... you doing?》

All of a sudden, a female voice rang out. RBUR Pantyhose-san froze in place immediately. And then, instantly, she appeared next to him.

A pair of pantyhose.

A second pair of pantyhose appeared!

《WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING???!!!》

The new pair of pantyhose faced toward RBUR Pantyhose-san and began attacking him with her right and left legs with a whoosh. He let out a yelp as he dodged her blows.

It’s... a pantyhose showdown!

The two of them... er... two pairs of them went at it for a little while until RBUR Pantyhose-san spread out his legs in an “I give up” pose and their fight ended.

After it was over, the pantyhose with the female voice introduced herself as WRUR.

《I DO apologize. My brother sucks at mental manipulation, but he is actually not TOO bad at physical manipulation, so he CAN do these kinds of PRanks. —Come on Anija, bring her back NOW.》

“Huh? Prank?” I was confused.

《Anija!》

《F-FINE,》 a reluctant RBUR Pantyhose-san replied, then twirled around once. There was a whizzing sound, and in the blink of an eye...

“...Huh? What happened to me?”

...Amaneko-chan appeared!

“A... A... Amaneko-chan...” I blubbered out in a shaky voice, and embraced her.

“Wh? Whwh? Nii-sama, whats thish all of a shudden?” Amaneko-chan was taken aback. “You like it when people watch?! I-I... I wanted my firsh time to be jusht the two of ush, but.....!”

It seemed like RBUR Pantyhose-san wanted to see how I would answer the question he asked earlier while I was in an agitated state. *What a way to mess with people, sheesh...*

Even after going through that, Amaneko-chan was staring at the pantyhose with eyes that sparkled, and started having quite the lively conversation. I was about to join in myself when Kuroha came up beside me and whispered in my ear.

“...Hey, Onii-chan. What were you going to answer before?”

Oh come on...

“Kuroha, do you really even have to ask? I’m a little disappointed in you as your big brother. I thought you of all people would understand.”

“...Yeah, I see,” answered Kuroha sadly, averting her eyes.

“I would choose my little sister.”

“Huh?” Kuroha looked deeply shocked.

“Ever since we were little, I’ve felt that your feelings you’ve given me would be enough for me to answer in that way... Am I overstating things?”

“No, you’re right...” answered Kuroha.

“And if there was another person out there with the same set of circumstances as me who would answer “literature” instead... Well, I wouldn’t want to read anything that person wrote.”

“But wouldn’t that person just be showing how much they would risk for their work?”

“Maybe so,” I said. “It’s a little hard to explain, but for me literature... Maybe that’s not really the final goal. I mean, I love literature, sure. But, well... I guess what I really want to do is to save people.”

“You’re saying your novels are nothing more than one step to

achieving your goal?" asked Kuroha.

"I wouldn't go that far," I said. "I'm sorry, it's something even I can't really put into words yet. All I can say for sure is that I feel like I want to save people with my novels. But, in order to even begin to do that, I first have to make the people who are important to me happy. That's what I believe."

"M-Make them... happy? Does that mean..." Kuroha looked at me with a face of sheer emotion...

Maybe what I was saying was too simplistic. I was sure that a person who had been betrayed by their love for their sister would have easily answered "literature," and if I were to want to earn a living writing, I would have to choose "literature," or in other words, my job.

But for me, at that moment, my answer was different.

"Well, depending on the circumstances I might choose literature though!"

The tension drained instantly from Kuroha as she nearly collapsed.

《...Little sister of mine, did you just HEAR that? The Great Father just uttered SOMETHing unthinkable.》

《Listen carefully. We MUST not overly interfere.》

《Little sister of mine, I am a Denierian. I am a member of the Pantyhose Party. And I AM a person from the 38th century. But AT the same time, I am Japanese, and I am the Prime Minister of Japan. I LOVE my country. And I love ITS culture. I must make sure that Gin Imose follows the CORrect path. 》

《As a fellow Japanese citizen who loves the culture of my country, I ALSO am in shock. But we must, as much as POSSible, leave things to their natural course. Also, Anija, you wear your nationalism a little bit too much on your leg. Are you PLANning on provoking the other nations by claiming the "○" of Earsh is the Japanese *hinomaru* again?》

《Oh SHUT up. What is wrong with a Japanese person who LOVES Japan? In order to preserve our country WE all should hold dear, we must be extremely careful about monitoring Gin Imose's progress. Ah YES, I thought of a good idea. What if I HEAVILY modify Gin Imose's mind so that HE chooses the right path of history?》

《There you go spouting NONsense again! What do you think might happen if you mess with Gin Imose's brain LIKE that? The symbols that BECOME the basis for Earsh might not be created, you know! You... You must know the reason for Gin Imose to CREATE that language of symbols, Anija!》

《Yes, yes... I'll BACK off. It's true that were something LIKE that to happen, it would be a BIG problem. I will go back to the future

NOW.》

The two pairs of pantyhose lined up in front of me.

《Great Father, it is nearing TIME for us to part. In actuality, this will be THE second time,》 said WRUR Pantyhose-san.

“Huh? The second time?” I asked.

《Ah, nevermind. Forget I SAID that. Or rather, I will have you forget.》

Oh, will you? In that case, let me ask one last thing...

“This is all a dream, right?”

《Fufu... That’s also the second time you’ve SAID that,》 said WRUR Pantyhose-san, not answering my question. Instead she spun around once.

《I WILL be watching over you,》 she said, and disappeared.

I blinked my eyes and looked over at where the pantyhose had just been.

But nothing was there.

Huh? Wh-What?

Without warning, everything went dark, and I lost consciousness.

——.....

knock knock knock knock

.....

Hnn... My consciousness returned, unsteadily. What is this banging sound in my ears? Is someone knocking on the door?

My head still groggy, I slowly got up and opened the door.

“...Good morning, Onii-chan,” said Kuroha, who was standing outside my room. “It’s already pretty late. You’d better get ready to check out.”

“Yeah... Good morning.”

Everyone else was standing behind Kuroha. That’s when I finally realized that it was morning. I had fallen asleep before I had ever realized it, I guessed.

Looking at the time, I saw that it was already half-past nine. Checkout was at ten, so I had to get ready quickly.

...

What is this? I have this strange sensation in my head. It’s all fuzzy, and just feels off.

“Hey, Kuroha, I feel like I had some kind of really weird dream,” I said.

“You too, Onii-chan?” said Kuroha, and she met glances with Amaneko-chan standing next to her.

“Nii-sama too? We are the same way-nodesu. We all feel like it wasn’t a dream though-nodesu...”

“Yeah, but...” I furled my brow, and Kuroha and Amaneko-chan nodded in agreement.

“But we can’t remember what it was,” said Kuroha, with Amaneko-chan agreeing.

Yeah. It’s the same for me.

“Anyway, let’s talk about it some other time.” Kuroha cut me off. “Hurry up and get ready. We’ll meet you at ten in the lobby, okay?”

Kuroha and the others all went to leave my room. Just then, I caught a glance of the black pantyhose that Kuroha was wearing. There wasn’t anything weird about them. Just your everyday black pantyhose you’d find for sale anywhere.

...It’s strange... Why is my gaze drawn to them?

Kuroha noticed where I was looking and pulled down on her skirt like she was trying to block my view of her thighs.

“Wh-What are you looking at? Creep...”

“...No, it’s...”

Suddenly, a voice rang out in my head. It must have been a hallucination.

When I get home, maybe I should get myself checked out at a hospital.

After all, it was very strange for me to hear a voice that said...

《I WILL be watching over you.》

★

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha’s room.

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san! Something terrible happened in the Diet!”

“Oh my, Gin-san. What in the world happened?” asked Yuzu-san.

“A member of the Diet barricaded themselves in!” I responded.

“Well that doesn’t happen every day. I wonder what could have caused it? Let’s check the newspaper,” suggested Kuroha.

■Special Report, “Nippon News” Edition August 4th, 2202

[TOKYO] In the afternoon of August 3rd, 2202, tensions within the ruling Little Sister Party were brought to a head around 2D Minister of Justice Ana-chan, and a member of the Diet barricaded himself within the National Assembly building.

This member of the Little Sister Party has had a history of extremist views with respect to Minister of Justice Ana-chan’s Sibling Rights, and he went so far as to barricade himself within the Diet building.

Minister Ana-chan appeared to calm the assembly member down, but due to a coincidental bug she told him “Fight for me, baby!” and caused the situation to worsen. The situation continued for ten hours, after which security broke down the barricade by force and subjugated the assembly member.

Thanks to the adorable appearance of Minister of Justice Ana-chan, the number of devotees within the party is considerable, and the

matter of her Sibling Rights has been a constant struggle, but it had, up until this incident, stayed beneath the surface.

The incident's roots can be traced to the fact that it was decided that party members would not receive a limited edition first pressing copy of Minister of Justice Ana-chan's debut single, "JUST ☆ LOVE" (includes the bonus item, "Encyclopedia of Ana-chan's Secrets"), which sparked criticism of the party's leadership.

When asked for comment in front of her official residence, Prime Minister Nyamo-chan said, "Now that's what I call an Ana Extremist Assertion!"

"Oh my... Ana Extremist Assertion?" questioned Yuzu-san.

"Kuroha, do you have anything to say?" I asked.

"I'm against dirty jokes," she answered, dryly.

Chapter 9: Compromise

“Miru-chan, it’s going to be a little field trip until you get home, okay? Actually, not just until you’re at home, but until you are in the bath, and squirming your thighs around while thinking about your big brother Odaira-niichan. I’ll even go so far as to say it won’t end until you’re tucked into bed and dreaming about me.”

“How about instead of me squirming my legs, you squirm in agony while clutching your chest, geezer?” Miru shot back.

It was less of a little field trip, and more a little vacation, of course. But it seemed like Odaira-sensei was just telling us to be careful on the way back like a proper elder guardian in his own way. At IZU we parted ways with Amaneko-chan and Odaira-sensei, as well as the professor, since we were headed in opposite directions to get home.

Mom and Dad met us at the station, and we handed them the souvenirs we bought for them, and talked about how our trip went, bringing this little vacation of ours to an uneventful conclusion.

I’ll remember this trip fondly.

Yes, this short time away from the usual daily schedule, that thing we call a vacation, had come to an end.

...Or so it should have.

Oh, the vacation ended, that was without a doubt. But what I would call my usual daily life did not return. It was like how Odaira-sensei had said it wouldn’t end “until you dream of me.” Perhaps like I was dozing off somewhere in a dream, and until the morning sun graced me with its presence, the window to these unfamiliar times would remain open.

It was the night we returned from the trip. I had headed straight for my desk, thinking I would write down what happened during the trip right away in my personal experience diary. But I had a guest appear in my room.

I was facing my computer screen and about to type my first letter. I heard a knock on my door and turned to look.

“Gin-san, may I come in...?” Yuzu-san entered my room, with some reservations.

“Wh—” The second I saw her, I was stunned silent. Yuzu-san wasn’t wearing her jersey, or her pajamas, or even the Hakumei

Academy uniform. She was wearing girly clothes. She was wearing a thin embroidered top, and a floaty pink skirt. It was a look you'd see all the time, but to me it was a shock.

After all...

Homyura!

Yuzu-san was wearing exactly what the heroine of *Oniaka*, Homyura, had worn. Yuzu-san, who was the person who was used as the model for Homyura, was now wearing the same outfit... It was like Homyura had jumped right out of the book.

You should probably be made aware that the style of clothing Homyura wore in the insert illustrations of *Oniaka* had become a standard look that hadn't changed through the times. Even in the current day it was considered a go-to fashion.

"Yuzu-san... Why are you dressed like that?"

"U-Um... Your mom and dad asked me if something had happened at the beach. When I told them that nothing happened, your mom told me to wear this and go to your room..."

"....."

"I-I'm sorry. I'm always just wearing jerseys, so these clothes are making it hard to calm down... Um... Do you... like it?"

"...I'm head over heels."

"O-Oh, I'm glad," said Yuzu-san.

"Yeah, but this is a surprise. I always thought you were just kind of picky and that's why you always wore jerseys."

"No, that's not it," explained Yuzu-san. "I'm really happy to wear the clothes your mom recommended to me." She broke out in a smile, like a brightly blossoming flower.

I was captivated by that smile. My heart was stolen by it.

It's not just that her face was like a work of art, it was like her smile was emanating happiness. An aura of a goddess that could make you happy just by being in its presence.

You remember how you told me before how your smile was fake, Yuzu-san? But this smile here is straight from the heart. That wonderful smile could never be something you can fake, no way.

A moment passed. And then another.

"Um... That's all I came to say, so... Goodnight." While I stood there, shocked in silence, Yuzu-san left like the evening breeze.

So she just came here to show me her Homyura-style outfit?

A little bit after she left, I put my hand to my chest.

Whoa... My heart is beating like crazy.

Yuzu-san was exactly like my first love, Homyura. I felt like I'd be seeing her in my dreams that night. In a flash, my heart had been filled with nothing but Yuzu-san, that much I knew. I thought that maybe I should have chased after her... But she was probably already

asleep. I reset my feelings and decided to try and get back to writing, staying in my room.

When thinking back on it later, this decision of mine might have changed my fate.

Just when I had gone back to my desk, I heard another knock on my door.

Kuroha was there, wearing her pajamas. She had just gotten out of the bath and her skin was still a little flushed. It seemed like she had tried using some of the bath salts we'd bought as souvenirs, as a nice scent wafted towards me. She was looking really sexy, and my heart let out a big **kathump**.

The moment Kuroha entered my room, she reached back and locked my door with a **click**.

"Huh? Why'd you do that?"

"Yuzu-san was just here, wasn't she?"

"Yeah..."

"...What did you do?" she asked.

"Nothing really. We just chatted for a bit."

"Liar. Tell me."

"I'm not lying, okay? She told me that Mom and Dad had asked her if anything happened at the beach. And that when she said nothing had happened, they told her to dress up like Homyura and come to my room..."

"And what did you think about Yuzu-san when she was dressed up like Homyura, Onii-chan?"

"Well I mean... It was Yuzu-san, who was the model for Homyura, and she was even wearing Homyura's clothes, so... Of course I'd like it."

Kuroha looked like she was about to cry for just a moment.

"And you came to my room just to ask me that?" I asked.

"Um, well... I didn't really have any good reason, don't mind me," answered Kuroha. "Go ahead and continue writing. I'll do my translation work."

"Sure."

Since Kuroha told me to, I turned back toward my desk. I could sense that Kuroha had sat down on the floor behind me, and was probably starting to work on her translations.

I tried to start writing my personal experience diary, but...

.....

...I can't concentrate. I mean, those scenes keep popping into my head.

Like that vision I had of Kuroha telling me that she loved me, or that time at the beach when she'd asked me for advice about her

friend who was in love with her brother.

Even if I tell myself not to worry about it, that's just not possible.

Damn it! I was perfectly fine with Kuroha being in my room just a little while ago, but...

I slowly turned around to look behind me. At the same time, Kuroha raised her gaze to meet mine. Our eyes met.

“...!”

“.....!”

I hurriedly returned my gaze to my computer screen, while she returned hers to her classical literature.

I could feel my pulse quickening, and knew that I was blushing in embarrassment. Even Kuroha seemed to have gotten a little red...

Sigh... What the heck are we siblings doing? I need to calm down, and start writing.

“H-Hey, Onii-chan...”

“Wha...” I was taken aback when Kuroha suddenly called out to me. “Wh-What is it? I said, turning around, seeing Kuroha sitting there with a determined look on her face. Just seeing her looking like that was enough to send my pulse through the ceiling.

“We need to talk. Will you listen to me...?”

——!

Th-This is it!

Kuroha was looking really serious, and I could tell this wasn't normal. Kuroha was definitely about to say something really big... I was so nervous I could hear my heart beating loudly. **kathump, kathump, kathump**

“I'll do it for you every night, Onii-chan,” spoke Kuroha, carefully and deliberately.

“D-Do what?”

Don't leave out the subject! Sentences needs subjects to be understood, damn it!

As I was flummoxed over her vague statement, Kuroha suggested something odd to me.

“I'll clean up your room for you every night from now on, Onii-chan.”

“...huh?”

She'll clean up my room?

Is that really all? What an anti-climax... And why is she suggesting this all of a sudden?

“But don't you have your translation work to do? I don't want to impose on you like that. I'm happy to clean up my room myself, all

right?"

"I can clean it up in no time, just like you take no time to clutter it up, Onii-chan."

"Every night?"

"Every night," she answered.

...

Well, I guess I'd be happy to have her clean up for me, but...

But come on, Kuroha. Your big brother here isn't going to let you leave it at that.

After all...

"Kuroha, is that really what you wanted to say?"

"Y-Yeah, it is," said Kuroha. "I just thought I'd tidy up your room, nice and clean."

"Then... why are you making a face that tells me you're suffering right now?"

"...!"

It had been bothering me since just before. Right around when she had said she would clean up for me, she had gotten this look on her face like she was enduring some pain.

"You can't tell me that you just wanted to clean up, not while you're looking like that."

Kuroha didn't answer.

Come on, Kuroha. Isn't what you wanted to tell me something else?

As I peered at her, Kuroha started laughing to herself.

"I'm such a failure... Such a coward. But..."

Kuroha tensed up her brows, and then stared at me with conviction in her eyes.

"Dad, Mom, Yuzu-san... Please forgive me..." Kuroha's eyes told me that she'd discarded all her worries.

★

★ ★ ★ □□※■●□ 2 3 ★☆▼▼□□ ★ ★ ★

I SEE, I SEE. Kuroha Imose has FINally... She has FINally decided to change her relationship with Gin Imose, YES. Was it that GENius girl who gave her the final push?

HMM.

The genius girl is suspicious. Even if I try and search her mind, it's GUARDED. ...It worries me a little BIT.

I think I should go and check exactly how that genius girl gave Kuroha Imose that push.

If I recall, it was the previous night, when they were all together in the bath.....

☆□♂ ♀ ∞◆▼▼

It took place one night prior, in a glass-walled onsen on the top floor of the resort hotel.

Yuzu was washing Miru's back, and Amaneko was watching them from a distance. The reason Amaneko had such a serious look on her face was probably because she was checking out Yuzu's, her rival in love's, proportions.

Kuroha was soaking in the hot water, watching Amaneko shooting daggers at Yuzu all the while feeling somewhat conflicted herself.

Why is she only worried about Yuzu-san? Does she think my body isn't anything to be concerned about?

"Ahahaha! What's with that wishy-washy face you're making? Worried about something-noda?"

"...?!" Kuroha was spooked by the sudden voice, and turned to her side.

Meguri had appeared out of nowhere, so close their shoulders were nearly touching. The goggles that she usually wore on her head were replaced with a white towel.

"Let me guess. You're pissed because *Jitsumai*-chan is only concerned about Yuzu-*chi*'s body, right?"

"..." Kuroha couldn't help but be surprised at how perceptive the professor was. Meguri was always taking things at her own pace, but she really was a keen observer of people.

As Kuroha started to feel defensive, Meguri cut in with a surprising statement.

"—So, things going well with Imose-kun?"

"Wh-What are you talking about all of a sudden?"

"What's sudden about it? Honestly I'm quite curious about it-noda," said Meguri, turning her gaze away from Kuroha. She first looked toward Amaneko, then at Yuzu, and finally back at Kuroha again.

Both Amaneko and Yuzu love Gin too, you know. If you keep dilly-dallying he'll get stolen from you. That's what Kuroha felt she was trying to tell her.

"So, how is it going?" pressed Meguri.

Kuroha didn't say anything back.

How is it that the professor can just say what she's feeling without any hesitation like that? thought Kuroha. Kuroha was, if you had to choose, someone who was more reserved with expressing her feelings. And, although it might be impolite to say so, Meguri did not look like someone who was particularly familiar with 3D romance.

"Kuro-chan, I bet you don't think that I'm too suited for talking about love and stuff, do you? I don't like being underestimated like that-noda. I love romance-noda! My woman's heart is quite well versed in it, you know. I have probably 300 years' worth of experience

of daily life at a women's high school, and maybe 100 people's worth of conquests under my belt-noda. I've completed every kind of route under the sun-noda."

"...You're talking about some kind of games?" sighed Kuroha, and Meguri just laughed it off as usual.

"Anyway, I can tell what you're worried about even if you don't say anything, Kuro-chan. You're worried about your parents and Yuzucchi, right?"

Kuroha looked at Meguri with a jolt. She'd been completely seen through.

"Looks like I hit it right on the head..." said Meguri.

Kuroha couldn't say anything back to her, and Meguri made a gun with her hand and laughed.

"Kuro-chan, look... I actually think of you as a friend-noda. Maybe I shouldn't be saying this, but I don't have many friends-noda."

"Huh?" Kuroha was taken aback. According to Meguri, she had a lot of friends she knew through her work, but she didn't really consider them friend-friends.

"So... So I was thinking I wanted to be your friend, Kuro-chan, since you take everything so seriously. We could talk about a lot of stuff together..."

"Thank you," said Kuroha, her heart opening up. She had even less friends herself, and she felt a real bond start to bloom between them.

She's already seen through me, so there's no reason for me to hide my feelings... Let's ask the professor what she thinks about it... decided Kuroha.

"It's just as you say, Professor. I can't decide what it is I should do..."

"There's anime and games about this-noda. There are times when a couple, where something is stopping them from being together, stand up against their parents' opposition and end up eloping," said Meguri, lining up her left and right pointer fingers on the surface of the water and then having them dash away together, like they were a man and woman eloping.

Kuroha thought to herself about how her mother and father had eloped when they were younger. But she also thought about how much trouble that would cause for everyone else around her...

"I don't have any intention of doing something drastic like that," said Kuroha.

"But aren't your feelings about to burst?"

"They are, but..."

Meguri lifted up her two fingers that were floating on the water and pointed them at Kuroha.

“You’re annoying-noda.”

“...I’m... a hypocrite, I know.”

“No... That’s not true-noda,” said Meguri, her face suddenly kind. “Being so considerate about the others around you is what makes you so great, Kuro-chan.”

“I suppose so. Thanks,” said Kuroha, but her expression didn’t cheer up one bit.

“Kuro-chan, you really have it bad. In that case... I suppose you have to find a ‘compromise.’”

“A compromise?”

“Yeah. You’re trying to decide between doing nothing and going all out, right? But maybe instead of thinking about it in terms of black and white, you can find a third option-noda.”

“A third option? Not black or white... but gray?”

“Well, calling it ‘gray’ makes it sound like some half-measure, and I don’t like that-noda. But I think it’s better than just worrying about it and doing nothing-noda.”

Kuroha touched her hand to her chest under the water and closed her eyes. Back when Gin had almost been stolen from her at the Tower of Culture, Kuroha had finally realized exactly what she wanted her relationship with Gin to become.

It had already been a long time since she had realized her own feelings for him, eight years ago when she had learned about Gin’s early childhood. But she was too concerned about norms and expectations, and continued to lie to herself and everyone around her.

But no more. I’ve had enough of lying about my feelings.

She felt like if she kept loving Gin sincerely that he would reciprocate. Kuroha didn’t have much confidence in her feminine charms, but she was confident about the depth of her feelings.

I’ll make Onii-chan mine...

That’s what she had decided. And yet... When she thought about her parents or Yuzu-san and what her acting on her feelings without restraint would do to them, she just couldn’t.

Perhaps it wasn’t impossible to start a romantic relationship with Gin without telling anyone else, and in fact she had decided to do that for a time. But now after what had happened in “GAI ODAIRAS CLASSROOM CAFETERIA,” her conscience told her it was wrong. Kuroha didn’t have the mental fortitude to go through with it.

Onii-chan is the person on this planet I care about more than anyone else... But Mom and Dad and Yuzu-san are important to me, too...

Meguri had said to find a third choice.

Something other than doing nothing, or going all out. She wants me to find a third way. Like, even if he isn’t my lover, just as long as he and I have a special relationship... A special relationship where no one else can

come between us... That would be perfect.

Kuroha kept silent, thinking to herself. Meguri could tell she was seriously thinking about it and stayed quiet.

“...Ah,” said Kuroha, opening her eyes suddenly. She had a brilliant idea. “I think I might have found the answer.”

“Well, that’s good to hear-noda!”

Kuroha wasn’t 100% on board with this plan yet. First, Gin would have to go along with it. And for a little while they’d need to hide it from their parents and Yuzu. But it was the only way that didn’t hurt anyone, and still satisfied Kuroha’s heart... A delicate balance. And it wasn’t backwards looking... It was a productive solution.

“Thank you, Professor. Um... Can I ask you for advice again sometime?”

“Of course-noda. We can talk whenever you want-noda.”

“It’s strange to think you’re so interested in this though, Professor.”

“Well duh, we’re talking about *that* Gin Imose after all...”

“...?”

“Uh, oh, nevermind-noda. Anyway if you have any more worries, make sure to talk to me-noda!” said Meguri, smiling brightly.

Kuroha really felt how reliable Meguri was, but at the same time felt it was a little mysterious why she had suddenly become so close...

——.....

Kuroha closed her eyes tight, like she was working up the courage to say something. And then, she did.

“O-Onii-chan...”

“Y-Yeah?”

“Let’s do it... Every night.”

“Like I said... D-Do what?”

“.....ody...”

“Whaaaaah?! Go potty?!”

Ah! A brother and sister going potty together every night!

Th-That’s quite shocking, er... Quite literary... Er...

“Y-You idiot! Not that!” yelled Kuroha. “What I said was ‘WRITE-ON-THE-BODY!’”

“Huh? WRITE-ON-THE-BODY?”

“Yeah... It’s the origin of your prose, right? The first time you did it was back when we took baths together and you wrote on me, I think, so it’s k-kind of natural for me to be the one you write on.”

“...Well, I guess so, maybe... Can I write whatever?”

“I was hoping you could write your personal experience diary. Afterwards you can type it into your computer, or I could write it down. Either way. We’ll do it as a serial, yeah.”

“So the medium of Gin Imose’s historic first serialization will be

his little sister's 'body'?"

"Yup. And... Well, if you don't mind, I was hoping you would also let me give you advice."

"About what to write for my personal experience diary?"

"Yeah. After all, who knows when you'll be able to make your debut as an author, Onii-chan. I'll give you my opinion and help you write something that's balanced. The personal experience diary can be the basis for that."

"I appreciate the thought, but... wouldn't writing it on paper or something be just as good?"

I mean, we're talking WRITE-ON-THE-BODY here?

That means touching your body.

The way I used to be, I wouldn't have thought much of it, but now...

"I want you to go back to the origin of your writing, Onii-chan, please. And that origin is my back, remember?"

I didn't say anything in return. Kuroha's will seemed pretty firm.

"And there's something I want you to promise me, too. I want you to promise that you'll only do WRITE-ON-THE-BODY with me. And that you won't tell anyone else we're doing it every night."

"Anyone? Even our family?"

"Yeah. Not Mom, not Dad... Not Miru, and not Yuzu-san."

"..... So you mean, do it in secret?"

"I don't want anyone getting any weird ideas about it, and besides..."

"Besides what?" I asked.

Kuroha's eyes looked like they were almost tearing up.

"I want it to be our secret together."

Our secret.

A secret between an older brother and younger sister.

Just the sound of it was a shock.

"So that's what I propose," finished up Kuroha. "I'll leave whether or not to take me up on it to you, Onii-chan..."

.....

I wasn't able to just answer, "Sure." I turned over this sudden proposal Kuroha had just made me over in my mind. I didn't think it could be unrelated to the things that had happened lately. But I didn't have the luxury of time to carefully think it all through. Kuroha was right in front of me, her eyes filled with uncertainty, waiting for my answer...

I didn't have any basis for it, but I just knew that this decision I would make here would end up being a fateful one.

I...

"...accept. Kuroha, let's do as you say."

There was the thing about keeping it a secret from everyone, and

a lot of it wasn't really clear in my head yet. There were more than a couple things I wanted to ask.

In the end, it wasn't a logical decision. My cute little sister had asked me for something, and I as her brother was going to say yes, of course.

"Okay then, let's go ahead and start today," said Kuroha, with a relieved look on her face. She stood up and crawled into my bed.

"...Hey, why are you on my bed?"

"I'm a little tired after going to the beach," said Kuroha. "Just going to lie down for a bit. I'll make sure to go back to my room before I fall asleep."

"I see... So, we're going to do it there?"

"Isn't it easier if I'm lying down?"

Hesitating a bit, I sat down on the bed next to Kuroha. She was lying down, facing the wall. If I was the only one upright it would be hard to write, so I laid down next to her as if to hug her from behind.

This position is just like...

I blinked my eyes once to banish the worldly thought from my mind. But the words I spoke to her were the opposite.

"Um... It's okay if I do it on your bare back, right?"

WRITE-ON-THE-BODY is fundamentally about directly touching the skin, after all.

"Yeah. Go ahead," said Kuroha.

"Okay..."

I worked up the courage and lifted up Kuroha's pajama top. Her pretty white skin and thin proportions entered my vision. Kuroha didn't say anything, staying quiet and still.

I was about to place my finger on her back, but stopped. No matter how I thought about it, this was not a normal situation for an older brother and little sister to be in... The nervousness got so bad, I finally had to say something.

"Why? Why did you suggest this all of a sudden?"

Kuroha didn't answer immediately, and thought about it for a bit. But her answer was firm and resolute.

"It's a compromise."

.....

"What is that supposed to mean?" I asked.

"It means exactly what it means."

"And I don't understand, so I'm asking you."

"Then let me rephrase... It's substitution behavior."

"Now I understand even less."

"As I thought. Figure it out yourself."

... *Damn it. Don't trick your big brother with big words like that!*
Sheesh...

Fine! Fine, I'll write then. I'm really going to write now!

I let myself get carried away with the moment, and was about to write my personal experience diary on Kuroha's back...

...and that's when that vision of mine appeared again.

No, it's not a vision, is it? Not after I've remembered it so many times.

"I love you, Onii-chan."

.....

I see.

No matter how slow-witted I was, there was only one thing I could have thought. That vision actually happened, and Kuroha told me she loved me.

And in a romantic way, that is!

I had read more than 300 books of Orthodox style literature about romantic love between older brothers and little sisters. It was just that popular a genre, after all, so why couldn't it happen in real life?

If Kuroha loved me, I could understand why she asked me to do this every night. She must have wanted to be alone together with me, and have this special relationship with me... But then that raised even more questions.

Why wouldn't she tell me what she wanted directly? Did she think it's too soon, or was worried about what our parents would say?

...Argh, this is so frustrating...

Were I to have just asked her "Do you love me?" I was sure she'd just deny it. If she could say that so easily then she would have just expressed her feelings more directly to begin with. In other words, if she wasn't able to say it then, she wouldn't be able to say it when asked.

This isn't fair, Kuroha. There's nothing I can do, is there?

The one fully in charge of this relationship is you...

But...

Maybe that was for the best? If you had just come out and revealed your feelings to me right now, I would have been half glad, but also half taken aback. After Odaira-sensei had told me to go out and experience love, I had considered a lot of different things. But I hadn't found a clear answer yet.

All these feelings of mental anguish were swirling within me.

"Hey, Onii-chan..."

"Yeah?"

"How about we go and decide on a title for your personal experience diary?"

"A title, huh?" I said. I had never given my personal experience diary any title in particular.

Yeah, let me think...

"What title would you give it, Kuroha? Since you're the one who

suggested we make one, after all.”

“Don’t worry about me, choose whatever you like.”

“Well, I think I want to title it something you’d like, Kuroha.”

Hmm, if it was Kuroha, then...

“Okay, how about this?” I started.

“What? Did you have a good idea?”

“Yeah.”

I wrote the title on Kuroha’s back. It wasn’t trying to be anything deep. It was really very straightforward.

LILSIS READ KANJI

“How do you like it?”

“What the heck? ...Well, I *can* read kanji, but...” Kuroha laughed at my strange title. She said that it was odd that it didn’t have any symbols or anything.

Well, that’s just how I felt right now.

“Okay then Onii-chan, let’s create this ‘LILSIS READ KANJI’ together, starting now,” said Kuroha.

——!

I gasped.

It was strange, but when Kuroha said “Onii-chan, let’s create this together,” it was like she overlapped with Homyura in my mind. Homyura’s legendary line “I want to have Onii-chan’s baby,” was carved into history. The only part of the lines that were the same was the “Onii-chan,” but whether it was a child or a book, the idea of an older brother and younger sister creating something together was fundamentally the same, wasn’t it?

“Onii-chan, what are you waiting for? Hurry up and write today’s part.”

Kuroha’s white back was inviting me. I nodded, and softly placed my finger on her back.

That night I wrote “LILSIS READ KANJI” on Kuroha’s back.



Each time I'd move my finger, Kuroha would let out a little "Un..." or "Mm..." and act weird. Eventually she got used to it and stopped saying anything, but occasionally she'd touch her bare feet together and her dainty back would twitch a little.

Just as she said we would write it together, she would sometimes comment on it. Honestly speaking, I felt she butted in too much, but it seemed to make her really happy, so I stayed quiet and listened to her opinion.

In the end, after more than an hour, Kuroha started dozing off, and then fell asleep.

... Ah well. I'll just wake her up tomorrow morning before everyone gets up.

Kuroha's peacefully sleeping face was lying down right next to mine. Her long eyelashes, her shapely nose... Her sleeping face was surprisingly beautiful, and I couldn't stop my heart from racing.

This is what I thought.

Kuroha... You don't intend to fall asleep in my bed every night, do you?

If I asked her, she'd reply, "Of course not!" But I figured that this was how it would end up. She would come to my room at night, and I would arise in the morning in the comfort of her body's warmth.

An older brother and a younger sister sharing a bed together...

Th-This is bad. I mean, keeping it a secret is one thing, but this is completely breaking one of the Imose household's rules.

And in addition, there was something else I had begun to realize.

I had begun to see Kuroha as a member of the opposite sex.

Normally spending so much time with other members of your family prevents those kinds of feelings from occurring, but it seemed like I had the genes programmed to like little sisters. And not just 2D ones, but 3D ones as well.

So... the question is... can I keep it together, or not?

Kuroha, I just don't know. You seem to be happy there, sleeping, but I really don't know what's going to happen from now on.

I was filled with worry, but then I remembered something Kuroha had said. And, strangely, it made me calm down a bit.

"Let's create this together."

Yeah... That's right, Kuroha. Let's make something wonderful, together.

Your idea seems like it's got a lot of things to worry about. But if it lets me and you create something together, then maybe I can understand, I admitted to myself, as I quietly, gently stroked her black hair.

* * * ☐☐※■●☐ 2 3 ★☆▼▼☐☐ * * *

...

I STUdied the history of “The Great Father,” Gin Imose, before coming to this time period. And to KNOW him, as it were, it is necessary to know the GIRLS around him.

The girl he should choose to continue on the PROPER path is...
INDEED.

For a while now IT has thrown me for a LOOP.

The history I KNOW... Things are going a little DIFFerent, I feel.

Unlike my BROther, I will not do anything drastic, but this is something I must watch closely.

The thing that worries me the most, is...

☆☐_b ♀ ∞ ◆▼▼

Afterword

Hey, it's been a while. Kajii here.

Can you believe it's already volume 4? Wow!

This volume 4 is made with a little different concept than the volumes before it, and is a little experimental. There are sections written in 3rd person, and instead of one big plot it's more like a collection of short episodes. The work as a whole has also changed its tone a little bit. I'm kind of worried about how the readers will react to it being a little different than before, so I hope you enjoyed it.

Now then, I have more pages for this Afterword than usual, so I was thinking I could answer a question sent in from a reader. It's a question sent in from a female (!) reader, so that makes me very happy.

-Do you wear panties on your head, Kajii-sensei?

Gyah.

My God, what a question. Well, after calming down a bit I could tell that it was a question that was inspired by Odaira-sensei's actions, of course. Even so, I don't use Twitter or have a blog, and this was the first time anyone other than my personal friends had ever asked me something. And this first-ever question is about wearing panties on my head. Such is the biz. Couldn't be happier.

Anyway, to answer the question, I do not wear them every day, but I do have some experience wearing them...

...briefs, that is.

...my own briefs.

Thinking back to my childhood, it was when I was in 3rd or 4th grade. I had that insatiable curiosity and wanted to know what I would look like if I wore my underpants on my head, so I donned a freshly clean pair of briefs and stood in front of the mirror. I wasn't impressed. I then went and tried on my mom's pantyhose, and if I was to choose one or the other, it would be the pantyhose that left the bigger impression. It squished my face up and I kind of looked like one of those old-fashioned bank robbers. I vaguely remember trying the combination of briefs + pantyhose, but can't be certain.

Girls might not understand, but all us guys have tried wearing our underwear or other family member's underwear on our heads in elementary school! I bet all you male readers are all nodding and going, "Yup, yup." It's totally normal behavior!!! However, putting on

my mom's or sister's panties would be a little... I wonder? I mean I was just a ball of curiosity at that age, but I had no intention of wearing my mom's panties on my head at the time. I mean that's just gross (sorry to all my readers with a Mom fetish.) I don't have any sisters, so I can't really speak to panties from one's big or little sisters, but would that be any different if I had sisters...?

It's time to get to the thanks and acknowledgments section. H-san, my editor, Halki Minamura-sensei, all the people involved, my best friend Y-san, my family and friends... Thank you all so much. And my utmost appreciation to the fans who sent fan letters! K-san from Kanagawa, sorry about including your question all of a sudden like this! Y-san from Fukushima, just as you surmised, the setting of volume 2 was in Fukushima. It makes me happy you figured that out.

Now then, let us meet again in volume 5.

April 2012, Takashi Kajii

Notes from the English Translator: An Over-Analysis Part 4

Well? Are you feeling uncomfortable yet? Did that ending leave you oddly unsatisfied? That, I'm afraid, is very much the point.

English translator here, and I suppose the first thing I need to do is apologize. After all, this volume is being released more than a year after volume 3. Perhaps you dear readers deserve an explanation.

Although I mentioned this in my notes for volume 1, I, Sam Pinansky, am not only the translator for this series, but also the founder and owner of J-Novel Club itself.

I chose to translate one of our launch series myself, because of a number of reasons. The first was merely to save money. I had no outside investors, and by translating a series myself, I basically give myself headroom to pay someone to translate another series. The second was that since no one had ever serialized novels like this before us, I felt a responsibility to experience what it was like for my translators and editors to produce 30-40 pages on a weekly basis myself, and then perhaps to modify my business model or pay rates appropriately once I had some practical data. Finally, this particular work was so unique and had so many challenges from a translation perspective, I felt like I shouldn't go inflicting it on anyone else. Or in other words, I felt like I was the only one who could do it justice.

But, as J-Novel Club grew rapidly in early 2017, it became increasingly clear that I simply did not have time to translate a series as well as run everything else. If *Siskan* had been a major seller, I likely would have found another translator to take over, but as its sales are... let me just say, limited... it continued to be that thing I would get to just as soon as I finished all the other things I had to do. Which ended up being basically never.

But finally, after more than a year, volume 4 is finished. For those of you who patiently waited for this moment, I truly give you my thanks. Volume 5 will be completed this year, I will begin the translation in mid July. Thank you so much for your patience.

Now then, what about this volume where everything is put into place, but nothing really happens?

The Japanese author explains in his afterword that he experimented with a number of different story-telling forms here, both

in 3rd person and in semi-3rd person from other character's perspectives. From a translation perspective this was quite interesting, as up until now we have only ever had Gin (or occasionally, Sadame)'s narrative voice. It was quite refreshing to have a narrator that was at least slightly reliable.

The Pantyhose Party Members from the 38th century were quite a challenge to translate. Their random usages of capital letters is designed to evoke their random usages of katakana script, which is supposed to sound a little "off", since their lines are filtered through some translation device. Well, technically it's 3 translation devices. Once from 38th century Earsh to 23rd century Japanese, once from 23rd century Japanese to 21st century Japanese, and then finally from 21st century Japanese to 21st century English.

With respect to the Pantyhose Party member's names, WRUR was originally "Kabu-ro" with "kabu" being the left leg and "uro" being the right. Note that the verb, "kaburu" means "to wear (on one's head)" in Japanese. Her brother, the Prime Minister, is "Iji-ro", with "Iji" being his left leg, and "iro" being his right. "Ijiru" is a verb that means "to fiddle with" or "to fidget with". I made the decision to localize their names for humor's sake, and the capitalization is a way to still have them sound futuristic.

There were, as usual, a number of completely untranslatable (or so you'd think!) puns in this volume. Right off the bat, there was the expression "seiten no hekireki", which is accurately translated as a "bolt from the blue". The original off color joke Gin unintentionally made was abbreviating it to "sei-heki", which means something like "sexual proclivity". Thankfully the pun I made in english was of a similar nature.

The translation of "CLASSROOM CAFETERIA" was a difficult choice to make. In traditional Japanese elementary schools, they do not have a separate cafeteria for lunch, but rather members of the class rotate being on lunch duty, and wheel around a cart of food inside the classroom which is served at children's desks, or they can bring their own *bento*, i.e. lunch box. The original Japanese word used is "kyuushoku", which means "food service", but is generally only used to refer to this school lunch serving. It evokes that old fashioned Japanese elementary school nostalgia, but since there is no equivalent culture in the West, I went with something more descriptive, which hopefully made it understandable why the restaurant was modeled after a classroom.

"I wonder if there's a good public beach around."/"reach-around". The original Japanese was, "I wonder if there is a 海水浴場 (kaisuiyokujou/beach resort) around?" and Amaneko-chan confuses 浴

場(yokujou) for a different 欲情(yokujou), which means “has the hots for”. Her response means more like, “Yokujou? Did you just say you have the youkujou(hots) for me?”. I’m pretty proud of how close I managed to keep this horrible pun to the original.

When Amaneko-chan calls Kuroha a “virgin”, and Gin remarks, “like the olive oil?”, this is because Gin doesn’t know the meaning of the Japanese word “dotei(virgin)” as we found out back in an earlier volume. Rather than using the Japanese though, I felt it maintained the humor to just have Gin be clueless.

“The X may die, but the Y shall never perish!” This is based on a quote from the founder of the first political party (the “liberty party”) in Japan, Hakushaku Itagaki, who was reported to have shouted “Itagaki may die, but liberty shall never perish!” when he was stabbed by an attacker in Gifu in 1882, and the expression is still used as a political rallying cry today.

“Ana Extremist Insertion”. Clearly this is another untranslatable pun I did my best with. The original was a much simpler joke. Prime minister Nyamo-chan just calls them “Ana-kyoudai”, or “Ana brothers”. However, “ana” can mean, “hole”, and the phrase “ana kyoudai” is slang for men who have all screwed the same woman, i.e. brothers by hole. Honestly I like my pun better. It is kind of a stretch though. *Get it? A stretch?*

The next, and final, volume will bring this series to a conclusion. You may wonder exactly where it is going to go, as so far the author has set up a number of conflicts and hedged on every single one of them. And indeed these things do not have any easy answers. Everything that was set into motion in this volume will come to a head, and I hope you look forward to how Gin, Kuroha, and Yuzu end up.

Until we meet again.



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My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 4
by Takashi Kajii

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